The thought-provoking, aesthetically pleasing animated films of Hayao Miyazaki attract audiences well beyond the director's native Japan. *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away* were critically acclaimed upon U.S. release, and the earlier *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service* have found popularity with Americans on DVD.

This critical study of Miyazaki's work begins with an analysis of the visual conventions of *manga*, Japanese comic books, and *animé*; an overview of Japanese animated films; and a consideration of the techniques deployed by both traditional cel and computer animation. This section also details Miyazaki's early forays into comic books and animation, and his output prior to his founding of Studio Ghibli. Part Two concentrates on the Studio Ghibli era, outlining the company's development and analyzing the director's productions between 1984 and 2004, including *Castle in the Sky*, *My Neighbor Totoro* and his newest, *Howl's Moving Castle*. Appendices supply information about Studio Ghibli merchandise, Miyazaki's global fan base, and the output of other Ghibli directors.

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On the cover: Poster art for the Studio Ghibli/Disney 2004 film *Howl's Moving Castle* (Photofest)

Cavallaro THE ANIMÉ ART OF HAYAO MIYAZAKI

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DANI CAVALLARO

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The Animé Art
of Hayao Miyazaki

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The Animé Art of Hayao Miyazaki

Dani Cavallaro

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To Paddy, with love and gratitude

"To be a witch, to be an artist, to be a baker....
It's an energy bestowed by the gods or someone, right?
Though thanks to it, we do have to suffer at times."
— Ursula, *Kiki's Delivery Service*

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Preface

The escalating appeal of Hayao Miyazaki's films across the continents, matched by the record-breaking box-office performance of his most recent productions, calls for an up-to-date evaluation of his accomplishments in a directing capacity and of his contributions to works involving other animation practitioners attached to his company, Studio Ghibli. This book will function as an introduction for audiences as yet only marginally familiar with Miyazaki's oeuvre, while deepening the understanding of the director's life, thought and creative process for those who are acquainted with his movies and are eager to move beyond the propaedeutic stage.

A firm believer in the wisdom of children, Miyazaki has consistently tackled grave issues without ever sanitizing or sentimentalizing their import, let alone dishing out definitive resolutions. These issues range from environmental depletion, the horrors of war, the iniquities of totalitarian regimes and people's enslavement to commodity fetishism, to the setbacks entailed by personal development, the loss of innocence and the cultivation of the values of loyalty, gratitude, courage, self-sacrifice and love. Concomitantly, the director is able to immerse his perceptions of human strife in a wondrous atmosphere of visual and moral grace that invariably verges upon, and frequently achieves aesthetic sublimity. At times, this sense of the sublime is conveyed by cinematic sequences of genuinely heroical grandeur, while at others, and no less memorably, Miyazaki's vision thrives on the unparalleled merit of simplicity: the most elementary plot twist, the least affected facial expression or gesture, and the subtlest chromatic shift may accomplish almost imperceptibly what overtly theatrical set pieces favored by Hollywood animation could barely aspire to.

Drawing on a range of sources of distinctively Japanese and Western derivation, Miyazaki situates his narratives in natural and architectural contexts characterized by stunning graphic richness, textural intricacy and scrupulous attention to the minutest and most unusual details. At all times, it is impossible not to sense the director's ardent commitment to hands-on craftsmanship even in productions that resort to digital tools and techniques. The outcome is a luxuriant swirl of cinematic poetry wherein the homely and the surreal harmoniously coalesce. The movies' amalgamation of disparate sources is also borne out by the presence, within their tapestries, of elements typical of diverse genres, including science fiction, action adventure, romance, comedy, horror,

the fairy tale, the folktale, the epic saga, the thriller and the war story, as well as myriad allusions to mythology, religion and philosophy.

***

This book opens with a panoramic introduction to Miyazaki's work describing his visual repertoire, pivotal themes and cinematographical style. The first two chapters situate the films in relation to two complementary contexts: the visual conventions underlying *manga* and *animé*, and the principal features of traditional and digital animation. Miyazaki's early experiences in the realms of comic books and animation, as well as his roles in pre–Ghibli productions, are thereafter examined. The rest of the text focuses on the Ghibli era, assessing the company's development and discussing in depth Miyazaki's output between *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004). Each film is appraised with reference to its central themes, narrative structure, topical relevance and place within the broad context of Miyazaki's corpus. Close attention is also devoted to specific animation techniques and cinematographical operations, through detailed analyses of the film texts themselves and parallel assessments of the storyboards, concept art and model sheets executed for the various productions by Miyazaki and his team. Data regarding production schedules and achievements at the box office are also supplied where appropriate.

Various chapters, chronologically situated throughout the text, explore other productions emanating from Studio Ghibli, or otherwise involving Ghibli staff but realized for other studios, to which Miyazaki has directly or indirectly contributed, e.g., in the capacities of concept and storyboard designer or producer. (The only exceptions are three TV commercials directed by Miyazaki himself and here deemed worthy of inclusion but not so substantial as to require chapter-length analyses.) These chapters are integral parts of the book's content and structure as reflections on Studio Ghibli's eminently *collaborative* nature. This is a major aspect of Miyazaki's ethos which drew me to it in the first place and which I sought to capture by conveying the working pattern of a whole group rather than a single artist. It is also, importantly, what distinguishes Miyazaki's outlook most radically from Western approaches to animation: whereas the term "Disney," for instance, is customarily coupled with the individual figure of Walt Disney, Studio Ghibli is a fundamentally corporate entity of which Miyazaki's opus may be regarded as a prime buildingblock but by no means the only vital component. The Filmography supplies additional information about Ghibli's engagement in the production of tie-ins, the fandom phenomenon and filmographical details.

***

I discovered Miyazaki's works by a rather circuitous route, somewhat redolent of the convoluted itineraries traced by his own characters in the pursuit of their diverse goals. Having devoted several months to the study of the relationship between cinema and digital technology and having thereby come to focus specifically on the field of animation, I began to wonder whether that art was globally dominated by CGI (as an inspection of mainstream Hollywood animation suggests). I found that this was not

the case and that Japanese animation, in particular, still relied substantially — even when incorporating digital techniques — on pencils, pens and paintbrushes. Moreover, it rapidly became apparent that this dedication to traditional methodologies had not merely delivered locally entertaining films but actually led to the production of internationally acclaimed films among which Miyazaki's works were hailed as the uncontested trailblazers.

I therefore proceeded to familiarize myself with the director's movies, and firsthand experience thereof was more than sufficient to inspire me to devote a monographic study to Miyazaki and his studio. In the course of my research, I availed myself of a selection of conventionally published materials, as well as of online articles, reviews and discussion forums. One of the most crucial resources doubtlessly consisted of the immensely informative Japanese art books devoted to various practical aspects of Studio Ghibli's productions from the storyboard to the screen. However, it must be stressed that no research activity, however punctiliously conducted this may be, could ever replace the experience of watching (again and again and again) the films themselves in a mood of ongoing openness to fresh revelations, and commodious willingness to redefine established perceptions, regardless of the number of repeat viewings one may have undertaken.

What intrigued me most throughout the project was the director's distinctive ability to engage with domestic adventures and full-blown epics, gentle visuals and graphic sumptuousness, with equal doses of sensitivity, daring and generosity. What I still find an unremitting source of wonder and delight is the fact that the effectiveness of Miyazaki's simplest images (often redolent of traditional Japanese prints) derives, more often than not, from their unpretentious discreetness and a total commitment to meticulous rendition. The concurrently accurate and touching representation of ostensibly modest items seems to require no less effort, alacrity or vigor than the staging of the most opulent action scene.

Most crucially, Miyazaki's films bear witness to a keen understanding of animation as the most unfettered and potentially the most creative cinematic form thanks to its knack of transcending the laws of physics and biology, as well as flouting the expectations of logic and mimesis with carnivalesque gusto. In keeping with animation's irreverent and feasibly anarchic spirit, Miyazaki's films consistently celebrate ambiguity and irony over dogmatism, and diversity over uniformity, in the recognition that human virtues and flaws are always — inextricably and ineluctably — intertwined. This trait of the director's unique signature is what unremittingly fuelled my passion for the subject throughout the research and writing, and what I have sought to communicate to the reader in as dispassionate a fashion as I am capable of forging.

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Introduction

With the international success of *Princess Mononoke* (*Mononoke Hime*, 1997) and *Spirited Away* (*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, 2001), animation director Hayao Miyazaki established himself as a masterful creator of both enchanting fantasies and thought-provoking scenarios, often more tantalizing for adult spectators than for children. The appeal of Miyazaki's movies has accordingly been rapidly growing not only among *animé* experts and *otaku*[1] but also, more importantly, among a worldwide general audience comprising diverse age groups and the broad domain of film criticism.

Whereas in Japan Miyazaki is as popular as Steven Spielberg and J.K. Rowling are in the West, his name has not quite yet entered every Western household. Nevertheless, admirers of his work abound across the continents, including practitioners within the animation industry and the film industry in general, comic artists and video game designers and, increasingly, the multifarious ranks of lay moviegoers. Miyazaki's movies are indubitably attracting audiences situated well beyond the cultural and geographical bounds of his native Japan.[2]

Over the past two decades — and indeed for longer if one takes into account the director's output before the foundation of his own studio, Studio Ghibli — Miyazaki has brought to life intricate fantasy realms, building each from scratch and drawing their most minute items with total devotion. Within these domains, Eastern and Western traditions, ancient mythologies and contemporary cultures, the magical visions of children and the pragmatic outlooks of adults intriguingly coalesce. At the same time, in using traditional cel animation and cutting-edge digital techniques — employing computers to manipulate images and to accomplish visual and special effects unattainable by traditional means, yet remaining faithful to the two-dimensionality of the art of drawing — the director and his studio have crucially redefined the standards of contemporary animation.

Miyazaki's wondrous worlds are as challenging as they are spellbinding due to their simultaneous evocation of an elating sense of freedom and of a harrowing vision of life's darker facets. This conceptual mix is created by positing the encounter with a magical Other as a metaphor not merely for a flight of fancy but also, more importantly, for the imperative to confront maturely and responsibly the full import of such an encounter, regardless of the difficulties, afflictions and humiliations involved in the process. No

imaginary domain ultimately promises unconditional escape from moral and social obligations, and from the power of language to affirm or deny both personal and collective identities. Above all, learning how to respect and honor other people and one's environment at large is the prerequisite for the acquisition of a sense of self.

Concomitantly, Miyazaki is also eager to show that no ostensible resolution to the quest for self-fulfillment is ever likely to be conclusive. His endings, therefore, steer clear of consolatory, tidying-up messages, offering instead purely provisional closures which audiences can scarcely anticipate or presuppose. The plots themselves tend to follow life's own unpredictable flux more than the narrative and dramatic criteria codified by mainstream spectacle. As the director himself has stated,

> I gave up on making a happy ending in the true sense a long time ago. I can go no further than the ending in which the lead character gets over one issue for the time being. Many things will happen after this.... I think that's as far as I can go. From the standpoint of a movie maker, it would be easier if I could make a movie in which "everybody became happy because they defeated the evil villain" [Miyazaki 1988a].

It is vital to bear in mind, in this regard, that Japanese comics (*manga*) and their spin-offs in the domain of Japanese animation (*animé*) do not abide by the criteria of the typically Western narrative structure, with its three-act format leading from the delineation of characters and situations, through a series of conflicts and complications, to a dénouement. In fact, although they are broadly conceived of as eventually conducive to a resolution, *manga* tend to unfold over several years and therefore experience often substantial reorientations. Animated series and features based upon them target audiences intimately acquainted with their narrative content. As Alessandro Bencivenni explains, in *manga*-inspired animations,

> the set-up is reduced to a bare minimum, and various key elements and narrative transitions are taken for granted. The Japanese viewer goes to the cinema to see a familiar story and to take pleasure from the ingenuity and nuances of its translation into an animated film.... The Western spectator's situation is different, insofar as s/he is projected into the world of the story without the benefit of any mediations and therefore struggles to follow its complications. It is often hard to come to grips with the plot if its premises are not known in advance. This is what prevented the first great animated feature from Japan, Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* [1988], from being adequately appreciated when it was released [in the West] [Bencivenni 2003, p. 13; my translation].

However, Miyazaki's films do not adhere slavishly to Japanese narrative conventions either. For one thing, he has made it Studio Ghibli's primary objective to produce feature-length movies and not TV series, although it is in the latter format that *animé* has asserted itself as a major component of popular culture.

Furthermore, instead of deriving inspiration solely from *manga*, Miyazaki harks back to heterogeneous sources, thus begetting an imaginary and deeply defamiliarizing vision of human society, traversed by myriad fragments of a transgeographical universal unconscious. The films are woven from both cross-cultural elements and aspects of

the director's native culture. As discussed below in some detail, they are *globally* relevant by virtue of the central themes they handle; closely bound with *Western* culture due to the literary and cinematographical sources they draw upon, and to the settings which several of them employ; and distinctively *Japanese* in their use of tradition and lore, their display of an eminently pictographic sensibility, and their original adaptation of *manga* and *animé* aesthetics.

***

The social, psychological, political and economic preoccupations addressed by Miyazaki's films hold cross-cultural and even universal relevance. Most prominent among them are the fate of the ecosystem, the ever-present phantom of war, the evils of totalitarianism and the vicissitudes of self-development. As far as the relationship between the natural environment and human technology is concerned, in particular, this is alternately addressed in a utopian vein emphasizing prospects of peace and regeneration, and in a pragmatic mode that accepts the inevitability of technology even in scenarios of relative harmony between humankind and nature. The problems emanating from these issues are posited as ubiquitous, inveterate and very possibly ineradicable, even as the director promulgates a worldview wherein everything is continually changing, and much of the time people have nothing to go by except ephemeral patterns spun from the contingent moment's vaporous scenarios.

In acknowledging the worldwide relevance of Miyazaki's movies, it must nonetheless be emphasized that several of the legends, traditions and customs which they draw upon carry specifically Japanese connotations, and that a modicum of familiarity with the director's indigenous culture is therefore bound to enhance the viewer's enjoyment of some of his productions (most notably, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*). Where the specifically Japanese dimension of Miyazaki's output is concerned, it is also important to take carefully into consideration the director's sociopolitical origins and situation. Miyazaki's films and personal circumstances remind us that since the Second World War, Japanese culture has had to negotiate, often painfully, its damning association with an aggressive, expansionist and belligerent mentality. At the same time, it has had to grapple with the impact on its traditions and customs of West-dominated globalization. Miyazaki's tales — although they never explicitly represent modern conflicts — bear witness to these issues by dramatizing the numerous difficulties involved in the acquisition and development of a cultural identity at the individual and the collective levels.

Miyazaki has consistently advocated pacifist and egalitarian principles, while also striving to come to terms with a troubling sense of his family's complicity with the war: his father was the director and his uncle the owner of the factory responsible for production of rudders used on kamikaze planes. Moreover, Miyazaki has retained a keen and shamed awareness of the privileged situation enjoyed by himself and by his family during the war, the opportunity to move to the countryside town of Utsunomya, located about 60 miles from Tokyo. As a result, they did not have to openly confront the horrors faced by the more defenseless victims of the conflict. This sense of guilt lies at the roots of the most overtly adult of Miyazaki's films, namely *Porco Rosso*.

One of the most distinctively Japanese aspects of Miyazaki's films arguably lies with the emphasis they place on the importance of developing, from a relatively early age, a keen sense of personal responsibility, as well as independence and autonomy, in a world that consistently appears to swamp the notions of individual identity and privacy. The process of socialization of the young is thus consistently depicted as a rite of passage embracing both the joys and the tribulations of psychological and emotional growth. However, the ethical imperatives promoted by the films are not situated in a strictly Japanese framework of codes, conventions, rituals and mores. Hence, they are capable of appealing to non–Japanese viewers and to their own sensitivity to the *Bildungsroman* topos as a thematic and structural motif that has consistently played a major part in the art and literature of numerous cultures.

On the whole, therefore, it could be plausibly maintained that Miyazaki eschews ethnocentricity, and that this is attested to not only by his treatment of globally consequential issues but also by his extensive use of Western styles, imagery and thematic points of reference. This proclivity is partly attributable to his exposure — via the Children's Literature Research Society run by the university where he graduated with a degree in politics and economics — to Western authors such as Philippa Pearce, Rosemary Sutcliffe, Eleanor Farjeon and Arthur Ransome. Years later, the director described these writers as some of the most influential sources of inspiration behind his films, citing Britain, specifically, as "a treasure trove of children's authors" (Miyazaki 1995a, p. 118). Subsequently, Miyazaki avidly consumed the output of numerous European and American writers — notably, Jonathan Swift, Jules Verne, J.R.R. Tolkien, Maurice Leblanc, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Isaac Asimov, Brian Aldiss, Ursula K. Le Guin, Diana Wynne Jones and Frank Herbert. His work, moreover, evinces more than merely cursory competence in the handling of elements derived from Greek and Norse mythology, Western folktales and fairy tales, and the Bible. Concurrently, Miyazaki has been deeply influenced by foreign cartoonists and animators, including Winsor McCay, Max Fleischer, Paul Grimault, Lev Atamanov, Frédéric Back and Yuri Norstein.

Miyazaki's visual register could be described as an intertextual collage of images and pictorial vocabularies distilled from a scrupulous exploration of the various sources enumerated above. At the same time, however, it echoes the graphic styles immortalized by Japanese art from the Middle Ages to the end of the nineteenth century — primarily the woodblock prints known as *ukiyo-e* ("pictures of the floating world" or "the transient show") and the works of Utamaro Kitagawa (1750–1806), Hokusai Katsushika (1760–1849) and Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858). Pervading these overtly local aspects of Miyazaki's style is a distinctively Japanese sensitivity to things, their beauty and the sadness of their passing, encapsulated by the principle of *mono no aware*.[3]

However, Miyazaki's settings are frequently informed by preeminently Western styles and imagery. Importantly, six out of Miyazaki's nine principal features are set in non–Japanese locations. The action of *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979) is situated in a peacefully picturesque European duchy, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) takes place in a half–European and half-alien world and *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986) in an imaginary milieu based on nineteenth-century Wales and on the quirky

projections of that century's techno-visionaries. *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) employ European-looking syntheses of architectural components derived from disparate cities, and *Porco Rosso* (1992) incorporates imaginary elements into a faithfully rendered representation of coastal Europe and rural northern Italy. *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*, conversely, use locations of distinctively Japanese provenance.

Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that the films endowed with explicitly Japanese connotations are automatically more Eastern than the others. Where *Totoro* is concerned, for instance, its focus on two young girls' negotiation of a troubling family situation and a potentially ominous environment makes it appealing to disparate audiences regardless of its meticulously detailed rendition of the Japanese countryside and of Japanese architecture and domestic habits. In *Mononoke*, the treatment of the relationship between nature and technology likewise extends the narrative's sociopolitical cogency well beyond the boundaries of the director's native country. As for *Spirited Away*, the economic/commercial setup which the film highlights is no more Oriental — despite the bath house's emphatically Chino-Nipponic structure and decor — than it is Western, due to its unsentimental representation of greed, acquisitiveness and self-indulgence. On the other hand, the productions that feature landscapes and cityscapes of Western derivation cannot be regarded as more Western than the ones just discussed, for what they primarily communicate to the viewer has less to do with the actual parts of the world on which those locations are loosely based than with Japanese perceptions of the West and especially of Europe.

The collusion of East and West is paralleled by two further forms of thematic and structural interplay. Firstly, Miyazaki's films symbolically bring together diverse time scales by tackling certain recurring issues in historically disparate contexts. Their recurring concern with the ecosystem, for example, manifests itself with equal poignance when set in the ancient past (*Mononoke*), in the present (*Spirited Away*), or in a postapocalyptic future (*Nausicaä*). As East and West, on the one hand, and various temporalities, on the other, subtly coalesce, so do multiple strands of reality and fantasy, enabling the grave matters treated in virtually all of Miyazaki's productions to be both enhanced and problematized by the interventions of preternatural beings and by the incidence of wizardly feats, dazzling spells and concurrently physical and mental metamorphoses. Through these, the experiences of children and those of adults beguilingly intersect, the complexity and richness of the former being perceptively and persistently emphasized.

Miyazaki's animation style likewise bridges two worlds and two traditions. His commitment to realism associates his films more with Disney than with mainstream Japanese *animé* — and especially with golden age Disney productions such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (dir. Walt Disney and David Hand, 1937), *Pinocchio* (dir. Ben Sharpsteen and Hamilton Luske, 1940) and *Fantasia* (dir. Walt Disney, 1940). Yet, Miyazaki gives priority to the narrative, enabling both its pathos and its humor to surface gradually and steadily as the action progresses instead of concentrating them into discrete filmic moments, whereas recent Disney animations accord privilege to the

production of entertainment packages replete with set pieces and song-and-dance sequences which come to constitute the core of the narrative rather than work as complements. In Disney, technique tends to take precedence over narrative, to the point that the story often becomes primarily a way of celebrating the animator's technical expertise.

Where Miyazaki's cinematographical style is concerned, it is noteworthy that the camera angles used in his movies often hark back to *manga*, where the method of storytelling through still images enables artists to use each frame as a means of showing details incrementally, of slowing the action down or speeding it up. *Animé* adopts an analogous approach, often taking a still image and moving the camera from left to right to convey the impression of movement though what is being presented is just a single static image. Above all, the director has an eager understanding of the comic-book dictate that something stylish or moving ought to happen on every page and has been able to translate this principle from the page to the screen. Frequently, spectators are presented with scenarios that invite responses analogous to those required by comic books. When we look at a comic-book page, our eyes have a propensity to move toward whatever grabs us as the most prominent element — this may coincide with what the artist has intended to be the page's vital part, but it need not automatically do so. This means that we have a choice as to how we approach and consume the story. Miyazaki's films situate us in the space of the narrative in the way comic books tend to do, presenting highly detailed tapestries of images wherein the prioritizing of certain elements over others does not preclude the viewer's freedom to focus on an apparently peripheral element and process the visuals on that basis.

Regardless of their cinematographical connections with *manga*, however, Miyazaki's works do not follow either uncritically or uniformly the Japanese comic-book aesthetics — which is another main reason for which they are able to attract non–Japanese audiences. In particular, they transcend the visual style exhibited by an ample proportion of *animé* productions and their *manga* counterparts in the depiction of their characters, and therefore discourage the spectator from automatically aligning those figures with stereotypical products of Japanimation. This is borne out, specifically, by Miyazaki's rejection of the conventional *manga*-style face dominated by enormous (and often preposterously colored) eyes and accordingly bound to rather a limited and repetitive repertoire of expressions. In fact, his characters tend to display a variety of facial modulations that mirror both their responses to contingent circumstances and their emotional progression through a certain story arc. As Andrew Osmond has noted, "While Miyazaki's characters broadly conform to *animé* conventions (wide eyes, lipless mouths, stylized features which appear Caucasian to Western viewers), they ... lack the overt stylization of much *animé*. This is particularly true of his young heroines, including Nausicaä" (Osmond 1998). Though portrayed as comely adolescents, those female figures cannot be dismissed as mere plastic dolls, nor do they comply with the stylistic requirements of the cute-babe *animé* protagonists that Philip Brophy has vividly described as "fusions of *Baywatch* extras, Barbie dolls and Care Bears" (Brophy 1995, p. 30).

This redefinition of feminine physiognomies runs parallel to Miyazaki's distinctive —

indeed unique — approach to the *shoujo* subgenre of *animé*. The term *shoujo* literally means "little female" and is commonly used to designate girls aged 12 or 13. On a metaphorical level, however, it alludes to the transitional stage between infancy and maturity, and its admixture of sexlessness and budding eroticism. On the whole, the worlds depicted by *shoujo* stories are serenely dreamy and bathed in an atmosphere of magic and wonder, in sharp contrast with the dark side of *animé* typically to be found in science-fiction and wartime plots.

According to Tamae Prindle, "What fascinates the Japanese is that the *shoujo* nestle in a shallow lacuna between adulthood and childhood, power and powerlessness, awareness and innocence as well as masculinity and femininity" (Prindle 1998, p. 35). In this respect, as Susan J. Napier points out, *shoujo* characters could be said to "embody the potential for unfettered change and excitement that is far less available to Japanese males, who are caught in the network of demanding workforce responsibilities" (Napier 2001, p. 119). Indeed, surprising as this may sound to Western cultures, *shoujo* stories are not consumed solely by female teenagers addicted to *kawaii* ("cute") consumer commodities, since adult Japanese males actually constitute a significant proportion of the *shoujo* audience and readership.

Miyazaki's young females are unquestionably *shoujo* in terms of their age and general appearance. However, where the average *shoujo* is portrayed as a passive being suspended in something of a timeless dreamland, Miyazaki's heroines are active, independent, courageous and inquisitive — to the point that some commentators have described them as "youths wearing *shoujo* masks" ("Panoramic Miyazaki" 1997, p. 2). The director has emphatically declared his determination to avoid representing attractive girls as mere "play toys for Lolita complex guys" or as "pets" (Miyazaki 1988a). In his most recent productions, Miyazaki has steered clear of conventional notions of feminine beauty altogether, both Chihiro's and Sophie's charisma (in *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle* respectively) resulting from qualities other than sheer physical attractiveness.

Representative examples of Miyazaki's approach can be seen in Nausicaä's treatment of her father's assassins, Sheeta's refusal to yield the magical crystal to the evil Muska (*Laputa*), Kiki's brave venture into a new life in an unfamiliar city, San's entire course of action (*Mononoke*) and Chihiro's willing submission to numerous challenges and humiliations for her parents' sake (*Spirited Away*). Though positively adventurous and risk-taking, Miyazaki's heroines are concurrently depicted as compassionate, gentle and magnanimous. The ambiguous nature of the typical Miyazaki girl is vividly encapsulated by the scene, in *Mononoke*, where San's bloodstained face defiantly confronts the viewer. The image would seem to connote a wholly savage disposition. Yet, the cause of San's ferocious appearance is actually a deeply nurturing act, namely her attempt to suck a bullet out of the Wolf God's body. Thus, at the same time as they endeavor to redefine one of the most popular varieties of *animé*, Miyazaki's films simultaneously deal in imaginative ways with gender and sexual relations, depicting intriguingly ambivalent characters that frequently transcend stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity.

The coexistence of ostensibly incompatible features in Miyazaki's protagonists is echoed by the hybrid nature of his topographies, where the most outlandish and remote fantasies meet and merge in mutual suffusion with the real and the contemporary. What lends these worlds utter credibility is their meticulous realization down to the most diminutive component. At the same time, Miyazaki's universes are ambivalently inconclusive because they tenaciously resist simplistic didacticism. In lamenting the passing of an age in which nature was acknowledged as an autonomous and immensely powerful force, Miyazaki's movies do not indulge in mere nostalgia for they frankly intimate that nature's forceful independence is unlikely ever be restored. All one could hope for is a situation in which humans and their technologies may achieve non-aggressive cohabitation and even cordial cooperation with the natural environment.

As to how those scenarios may be realized, Miyazaki offers various options. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, arguably the most overtly messianic and utopian of his movies, solemnizes the resurrection of the depleted Earth by an act of wholly selfless valor. *Laputa*, *Spirited Away* and *Howl* celebrate the power of love as a means of protecting the well-being of individuals and collectivities alike. *Mononoke* offers a more down-to-earth approach: though allowing for the forest's regeneration and asserting the enduring power of its spirits through an emphasis on the paramount importance of devotion and kinship, the film soberly draws attention to the ultimate incommensurability of San's and Ashitaka's worlds.

Miyazaki's cinema is eminently ethical. Yet his films never descend to the level of populist rhetoric, being in fact fearlessly explicit in their representation of evil and of its seductive powers. In redefining reality by transposing it onto an imaginary plane, the movies intrepidly refuse to camouflage life's sorrows or simplify its complexities in a Disneyesque fashion. In this respect, Miyazaki's approach is akin to the one favored by Akira Kurosawa (1910–1998; *Rashomon*, 1950; *Ikiru*, 1952; *The Seven Samurai*, 1954; *Throne of Blood*, 1957; *Dersu Uzala*, 1974; *Ran*, 1985), the best known Japanese director around the world. Indeed, Kurosawa himself has professed profound admiration for Miyazaki's work, describing its significance as far more substantial than that of his own cinematic corpus: "I am somewhat disturbed when critics lump our works together. One cannot minimize the importance of Miyazaki's work by comparing it to mine" (quoted in the Channel 4 Film Review of *Spirited Away*, 2003). Kurosawa included *My Neighbor Totoro* in his personal list of "100 Best Movies" and praised *Kiki's Delivery Service* profusely, admitting to having been moved to tears by it.

In the West, it may appear paradoxical that one of the greatest live-action directors of all time should attribute such magnitude to the productions of an animation director. This is because Western audiences tend to regard animation as a second-rate art form and — when judging specifically Japanese animation — to dismiss it as violent, superficial, clichéd and technically "cold." Such judgments are stereotypical, however, since they are based on moderate familiarity with only a small proportion of the Japanese animation industry's overall output. Furthermore, they do not take into consideration the distinctive importance of cartoons and animated films in the context of

Japan, failing to acknowledge that in that culture, *manga* (and their cinematic correlatives) are an integral component of literature and popular culture.

If we look at some of the masterpieces of Nipponic art from the past, it becomes clear that the Japanese have consistently expressed themselves in a pictographic mode characterized by the sustained intermingling of images and words, lines and meanings, pictures and poems, and that *manga* and *animé* are relatively recent manifestations of that trend. A work produced in 1814 that can help us grasp the deep-rootedness of something of a "cartoon vision" in Japan is the collection of sketches by the aforementioned Hokusai depicting vivid images of everyday life, plants, animals, deities, historical events and landscapes. Many of these have quite direct equivalents in Miyazaki's movies. What is most astonishing about the works of both artists is the curious attention devoted to the recording of minute details that may often go unheeded in real life and to translate them into technically immaculate and intensely atmospheric graphics.

This book examines the themes and images presented in Miyazaki's films from *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* to *Howl's Moving Castle*, with reference to Japanese and Western approaches to animation and their respective codes and conventions. The discussion focuses on the ways in which the director has imaginatively redefined the parameters of animation as both an art form and a medium, by dealing with issues of global cultural relevance, and by harmoniously integrating traditional cel animation and computer graphics images in an utterly novel cinematic synthesis and correspondingly fresh aesthetic vision. The book concurrently offers theme-based analyses of the director's seminal works and technique-based analyses of the tools and tricks deployed in — and, at times, specifically designed for — particular productions. Miyazaki's works are also assessed in relation to Studio Ghibli's overall output and to the company's aesthetic agenda, its historical and technological development, and its relationship with Disney Pictures (the Disney-Tokuma Deal, signed in 1996, grants almost worldwide distribution rights for certain Studio Ghibli films to the Walt Disney Corporation).

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1

The Frame of Reference

Manga *and* Animé

Manga are conventionally regarded as the equivalent of Western comic books or graphic novels yet are profoundly different from either, both in stylistic and in thematic terms. *Manga* constitute a much more influential cultural force in Japan than comics are in any Western society, being recognized as a respectable art form and compelling component of popular culture. Japanese *manga-ka* (*manga* writers) write for all age groups and cater for a wide range of interests, addressing "everyone from innocent young children to perverted sex-starved men (there is even a category for ex-juvenile delinquent mothers!). But even the kiddie stuff ... will sometimes depict death [and] the realities of life" ("What are *Manga* and *Animé*?"). "The wide range of *manga*," Susan J. Napier notes, "ensures that virtually everyone reads them.... Some estimates go so far as to suggest that forty percent of material published in Japan is in *manga* form" (Napier 2001, p. 20).

Manga also constitute a radical challenge to conventional Western approaches to the concept of authorship: "Fairly surprising for Western readers is that (somewhat like the Jazz approach to melody) *manga* artists don't feel that their stories and characters are set in stone. So a set of characters may build relationships, jobs, etc. in one set of stories ('story arc') only to have another story arc run where the same characters do not know each other ('Wikipedia Definition of *Manga*')."

Manga exhibit a specific visual style based on codes and conventions that differ profoundly from those employed by mainstream American cartoons. Most importantly, emphasis is frequently placed on line over form. Lipless mouths, exceptionally large eyes, markedly plastic and heart-shaped faces and exuberant bangs of hair of numerous (both normal and outlandish) hues are among some of the most ubiquitous traits of *manga* also adopted in the Japanese animation industry. Importantly, this style's distortions are not random but actually dictated by rigorous rules — e.g. in the establishment of the face's proportions, of the relationships obtaining among its various elements and of the appropriate positioning for the eye, ear, nose and chin lines.

Critics have insistently wondered why the characters that populate Japanese comics and animations look so emphatically non–Japanese. One possible explanation for this stylistic choice is that the majority of prominent artists seek to offer Japanese audiences

something of "an alternative world" (Napier 2001, p. 25)—as explicitly stressed by the like of animation director Mamoru Oshii (*Ghost in the Shell*, 1995, and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, 2004) and by Hayao Miyazaki himself. It is also noteworthy, if somewhat ironical, that the lipless mouths and huge childlike eyes now associated with Japanese productions were initially inspired by the American classic cartoons of the 1930s, upon which the epoch-making *manga* author Osamu Tezuka based his drawings. Most importantly, as Alessandro Bencivenni argues, "it is first of all necessary to consider the symbolic nature of the design. Comics and animations are perceived in accordance with conventions. Thus, though none of us has the Simpsons' yellow complexion, we perceive them as Western. Likewise, any Japanese, looking at the physiognomy of an *animé* or *manga* character, will instantly presume it is Oriental even though its eyes are not almond-shaped" (Bencivenni 2003, p. 153; my translation). In the context of Japan, specifically, it is vital to appreciate the ubiquitous penchant for stylization within this culture and its traditions. Ritual masks, Noh theatre and *bunraku* ("puppet") shows exemplify that trend. So does Japan's intrinsically pictographic worldview, encompassing calligraphy and the constant collusion of image and text, line and meaning, painting and poetry.

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The term *animé* designates Japanese animation and is closely related to *manga* not solely because several *animé* movies are based on stories told and illustrated in *manga* but also due to their stylistic features. (Before the term *animé* was coined, incidentally, it was common to refer to cartoons as *senga eiga*, namely "drawn line pictures.") The shooting techniques used in the *animé* world are overtly inspired by the pictorial style typical of *manga*. Indeed, *animé* consistently adopts the comic-strip formula requiring viewers to use their imagination to urge the narrative along. At the same time, as Trish Ledoux and Doug Ranney observe, the films "absolutely overflow with tracking shots, long-view establishing shots, fancy pans, unusual point-of-view 'camera angles' and extreme close-ups ... [i]n contrast with most American-produced animation [which] tends to thrive in an action-obsessed middle-distance" (Ledoux and Ranney 1997, p. 3).

According to Roger Ebert, one of the most distinctive formal features of *animé* consists of its employment of the visual equivalent of the *pillow words* used in Japanese poetry. As the critic explains, a pillow word "represents almost a musical beat between what went before and what comes after." Its cinematic correlative is the "pillow shot" so typical of Japanese cinema—as borne out, for example, by the films of Yasujiro Ozu. This is a transitional, often quite unexceptional, image situated at the end of a "phase" before the next segment of the action commences. It thus functions as a kind of punctuation, as well as a form of silence, which is fundamentally a way of saying 'let's not rush headlong from each scene to the next scene." When implemented in the specific context of animation, pillow shots invest this form with a sense of thoughtfulness. Furthermore, insofar as the images on which they pivot are frequently inconsequential in plot terms, the fact that Japanese animators should be willing to go to the trouble of

drawing and animating such moments with no less care than main sequences fully attests to their total dedication to their art (Ebert 2004).

As intimated by Ebert, silence plays an important role in Japanese animation, and indeed there are numerous scenes that contain no dialogue whatsoever. It is noteworthy, in this respect, that in the English dubbed version of Miyazaki's *Kiki's Delivery Service* several additional words and sounds occur at moments of silence in the original movie.

At the same time, as Gilles Poitras comments, "Much of the action in *animé* is framed as if it had been filmed with actual cameras ... backgrounds are more likely to be in motion and to change and turn [than in U.S. animation].... Not all *animé* uses a dynamic background, but much of it does, along with other cinematic effects such as pan shots, angles, distance shots, scenes where the focus between the foreground and the background changes" (Poitras 2001, pp. 57–58).

Like live-action cinema, *animé* features a great variety of genres:

- science fiction, including the following subgenres:
  - *mecha* (giant robot) stories
  - android-based stories
  - cyberpunk
  - war sagas
  - political epics
- fantasy, including the following subgenres:
  - stories based on Asian traditions
  - stories based on Western traditions
  - tales of the supernatural
  - myths and legends
  - comic fantasies
  - superhero/superheroine-based adventures
- comedy (ranging from the evocation of fantastic domains to slapstick)
- romance (tailored for different age groups)
- crime
- action adventure
- historical drama
- horror
- children's stories
- humanoid animal tales
- stories based on martial arts
- stories based on sports and team activities
- adaptations of literary classics
- medical dramas
- epics
- adult dramas (often war stories)
- erotica

- softcore porn
- hardcore porn

Miyazaki's films partake of several of these genres. Science fictional elements, specifically, feature in a number of his films, from *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* to *Howl's Moving Castle*. Science fiction is often interwoven with components of other genres and subgenres, as evinced by *Nausicaä*'s and *Howl*'s war-story traits, and by *Nausicaä*'s and *Laputa*'s connections with the political epic. The fantasy realms articulated by Miyazaki's *animé* alternately rely on indigenous lore (as attested to by *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Spirited Away*) and Western materials (e.g. *Howl* and *Kiki*). Although no Miyazaki film to date could unproblematically be described as a comedy, humorous moments abound across his output, ranging from Lupin III's farcical theatricality (*The Castle of Cagliostro*), through Tombo's charming clownishness (*Kiki*), to Lin's wry jocularity (*Spirited Away*). Romantic elements are likewise pervasive and modulated according to a character's position not merely within a personal relationship but also within a broader network of environmental, social and familial responsibilities and obligations. This is borne out by the depiction of heroines as diverse as Nausicaä, Sheeta (*Laputa*), Kiki, Fio (*Porco*), San (*Mononoke*), Chihiro (*Spirited Away*) and Sophie (*Howl*). Crime only features as the principal genre in *Cagliostro* and in *Porco Rosso* but indubitably has a subtextually crucial part to play in a number of Miyazaki's movies, from *Laputa* through *Princess Mononoke* to *Spirited Away*.

Despite the genre's amazing variety, *animé* is arguably classifiable with reference to three main categories: 1) *catastrophic animé*— this reflects, either overtly or elliptically, on the legacy of atomic bombing and its aftermath, on the phenomenon of urban alienation, on Japan's record-breaking suicide rates, and on the economic problems triggered by the collapse of the stock market in 1989 and occasioning the longest decline in any stock market since the Great Depression; 2) *carnivalesque animé*— this embodies the spirit of *matsuri*, a key component of Japan's social and ceremonial existence comparable to the Western carnival that signals a vital moment of ritualized transgression of conventional boundaries and distinctions — as Ian Buruma points out, "Pain and ecstasy, sex and death, worship and fear, purity and pollution are all vital elements in the Japanese festival" (Buruma 1984, p. 11); and 3) *nostalgic animé*— this conveys a sense of melancholy inspired by a deep-seated awareness of the transience of life and pleasure. This mournful disposition is encapsulated by the Japanese notion of *mono no aware*, the "sadness of things" — a concept which the achingly beautiful spectacle of cherry blossom (*sakura*) fully epitomizes.

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A crucial turning point in the history of Japanese animation was the production of *Alakazam the Great* (dir. Taiji Yabushita, 1960), a film based upon a 1950s *manga* adaptation by the aforementioned Osamu Tezuka of the ancient Chinese legend *Monkey King*. Widely regarded as one of Japan's most popular comic-book artists in history,

Tezuka virtually invented Japan's modern comic-book industry, and his involvement in the production of *Alakazam the Great* could be said to have set the foundations for the fertile relationship between *manga* and animated features that was to develop in later years and that still underpins contemporary *animé*. (Tezuka's art is assessed in some detail in the section devoted to Miyazaki's encounter with comics and animation.)

Historically, a no less pivotal moment in the evolution of Japanese animation was the production of the weekly TV series based upon Tezuka's futuristic *manga* entitled *Astro Boy*, which debuted on New Year's Day 1963. Following this hugely successful series, the 1960s witnessed a veritable explosion of TV science-fiction/action-adventure *animé* movies. By the 1970s, the range had expanded considerably and studios were busily churning out mystery dramas, soap operas and Western classics such as *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

The popularity of television animation owed much to Tezuka's eclectic style, an adventurous fusion of the codes and conventions of a wide variety of media, including children's picture books, romantic soap operas designed for women's magazines, bawdy men's magazines and political cartoons, thus establishing the cultural notion that cartooning should be seen as a form of storytelling suitable for *any* age group rather than merely kids.

Due to the West's initially limited exposure to *animé*, many people have tended to associate this art form exclusively with violent action, pornography and gore. Consequently, numerous videos have received X ratings merely on the basis of their having originated in Japan, even if the product in question was no more grisly or sexually graphic a film than *My Neighbour Totoro*. As Andrew Osmond explains, the reason behind this rather narrow perception of *animé* is, quite simply, that a large proportion of titles originally "imported to America and other Western countries" in the early 1980s were "targeted toward male consumers in their teens or early twenties, who prefer science-fiction adventures, action films and horror stories. This skews the *animé* released in the West toward these genres.... As a result, *animé* has gained a stigma in the West. Many journalists see it as a cultish sub-genre, characterized by obscure plots, science-fiction settings, explicit sex and violence, and cheap animation ... the notion of an intelligent, refined *animé* becomes self-contradictory." This view is squarely countered, according to Osmond, by Studio Ghibli's unique levels of accomplishment (Osmond 1999).

However, in recent years *animé* has been rapidly acquiring global appeal. Its growing popularity outside Japan could be attributed to the fact that "the medium is both different in a way that is appealing to a Western audience satiated on the predictabilities of American popular culture and also remarkably approachable in its universal themes and images" (Napier 2001, p. 10). Concurrently, *animé* has enabled Western audiences to formulate novel perceptions of Japan that constitute a refreshing alternative to the formulaic and staid images promulgated for decades by the guardians of tradition. As Poitras maintains, "Ever since the late 19th century there have been attempts to expose the West to many aspects of Japanese culture such as theatre, architecture, gardens.... These have had some success but have tended to convey a view of Japan as a

refined and artistic culture — and also as rather formal and even boring. Then *animé* and *manga* made their way across the seas, and many ... discovered Japan in a different light" (Poitras 1998, p. vi). Thus, "[o]utside Japan, *animé* has become *the* major way in which non–Japanese are exposed to Japanese culture" (Poitras 2001, p. 8).

In North America, *animé* series have become a staple of cable television and an exceptionally lucrative portion of the home-video market. Many *animé* features and OVA (Original Video Animation) series have been produced with a Western fan audience in mind. Some American cartoonists have recently endeavoured to mimic the *animé* style in the production of so-called *amerimés*. As Sumiere Kunieda has observed in an assessment of the impact of Japanese *animé* on Western cultures, the genre's increasing popularity is confirmed by the ever-growing penetration of American English by Japanese words popularized by animated features: "So often do Japanese words crop up, that the Yale *Animé* Society has devoted a page to '100 common Japanese terms' that appear in cartoons.... Internet searches for some of the words that are often associated with *animé* yield surprisingly large results. 'Manga' ... produced about 30 million results on a recent search on *Google*, while 'hentai' (perversion), came up with about 27 million pages" (Kunieda 2004).

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While *animé* is indubitably a phenomenon of popular culture, it also, as Napier points out, "clearly builds on previous high cultural traditions. Not only does the medium show influences from such Japanese traditional arts as Kabuki [a dominant form of theatre] and the woodblock print [*ukiyo-e*] (originally popular culture phenomena themselves), but it also makes use of worldwide artistic tools of twentieth-century cinema and photography" (Napier 2001, p. 4). *Animé*'s visual ancestors can be traced back to the Edo period (1600–1868) and even further back to mediaeval Zen cartoons. Also influential, as Melinda Takeuchi maintains, has been the imagery prevalent in the Bakumatsu and Meiji periods (1868–1912), with its keenness on the "depiction of supernatural themes" and its tendency to satisfy the public's "quickened appetite for images of the bizarre and the macabre" (Takeuchi 1997, p. 5).

Moreover, in spite of the genre's fundamental identity as a popular cultural phenomenon, the issues explored by *animé*— frequently through considerably complex and multilayered plots — are often analogous to those tackled by so-called high culture. For example, wartime violence and both personal and collective suffering are explored by dark *animé* movies such as *Barefoot Gen* (dir. Mori Masaki, 1983) and *Grave of the Fireflies* (dir. Isao Takahata, 1988) and by the TV series *Macross* (1982). The seminal *Akira* (dir. Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988) deals with apocalyptic anxieties encapsulated by society's pathological fear of its youth, and the OVA series *BubbleGum Crisis* (1987–1991) fathoms the evils of unscrupulous multinational corporations. *Patlabor* (dir. Mamoru Oshii, 1990) can be regarded as a trenchant critique of the "construction state," namely the practice of awarding public works contracts to selected companies to secure a steady income for the dominant LDP (Liberal Democratic Party). *Ghost in the Shell* (dir. Mamoru Oshii, 1995) addresses nothing less complex than the question of what makes

us human. Even when indulging in science fiction extravaganzas, *animé* films often engage seriously with the treatment of human emotions, as exemplified by the TV series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–1996). Miyazaki's films, for their part, cover a plethora of either subtly taunting or downright distressing subjects, ranging from the individual's obligation to develop a sense of moral responsibility from an early age, to environmental issues of potentially earth-shattering dimensions.

Animé also mirrors conflicting attitudes to femininity in contemporary Japan. For instance, the popular TV series of the mid-to-late 1990s *Kodomo no Omocha*, created by Miho Obana, commends simultaneously the traditional values of gentleness and compassion and the virtues of assertive and outspoken female characters, while the 1990s series *Dragon Ball Z* delivers fundamentally subservient females of the damsel-in-distress type. As will be argued in detail in the case studies, Miyazaki's movies propose an unrelenting interrogation of conventional gender stereotypes through a progressively ingenious debunking of culturally ingrained binary oppositions.

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Finally, it is worth noting that there is increasing evidence of *animé*'s gradual infiltration of the domain of live-action cinema. For example, Production I.G, the studio responsible for creating the *Ghost in the Shell* computer graphics, has also produced the animation footage for Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill, Vol. 1* (2003). The use of *animé* sequences in *Kill Bill* constitutes a unique application of Japanese-style animation to live-action cinema, concurrently demonstrating that the impact of that form on Western movie-makers is by no means limited to those who work specifically in the field of animation. In the first instalment of Tarantino's twin homage to practically every single instance of both Eastern and Western "grindhouse cinema," *animé* is employed in the scenes showing O-Ren Ishii's tumultuous origins. The sequence, based on the conventions of a typical *yakuza* movie, shows O-Ren's witnessing of the brutal murder of her parents by gangsters, her revenge and rise to notoriety as a top-notch killer later in life and, finally, her involvement in the beating of the Bride.

Tarantino is currently planning to write an *animé* feature film, also to be made by Production I.G, meant to serve as both a prequel and a sequel to his two *Kill Bill* movies, exploring the background against which Bill becomes a ruthless assassin, and dramatizing the killing of the Bride by Nikki ("Copperhead's" daughter, who was made to witness her mother's assassination in the first installment). Tarantino's project is certain to expose *animé* to new audiences — as has already been accomplished not only by the *animé* sequence in *Kill Bill, Vol. 1* but also by the *Animatrix* (the series of *animé*-inspired shorts released in 2003 between the second and the third installments of the Wachowskis' *Matrix* trilogy). The project demonstrates once again that *animé* is increasingly a force to be reckoned with outside Japan and outside the bounds of animated cinema, and hence a major influence on contemporary popular culture at large.

Cel Animation and Computer Graphics Images

"Cartoons," broadly understood as pictorial representations with a more or less overt narrative thrust, are arguably as old as humanity, the earliest documents consisting of cave paintings produced about 20,000 years ago. Egyptian hieroglyphs could also be regarded as proto-cartoons to the extent that in their initial configurations they were really a means of telling a story in a simplified or stylized fashion. In Europe, the most famous among the early cartoons of the Christian era is probably the Bayeaux tapestry, a highly refined work produced with the intention of recounting the Norman Conquest of Britain in 1066 by means of chronologically unfolding scenes. As far as animation is specifically concerned, its conception could be feasibly associated with the erection by the Egyptian Pharaoh Rameses II in 1600 B.C. of a temple dedicated to Isis, in which all the columns displayed painted images of the goddess in gradually changing positions, so that a viewer riding past would experience the illusion of movement. A comparable device was implemented by Greek artists in the decoration of pots with pictures of people or animals at different stages of an action. The semblance of motion would then be generated by spinning the vessel.

A number of varyingly ingenious instruments that could be seen as the ancestors of modern animation technology were designed between the mid-seventeenth century and the late nineteenth century. In 1640, the German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher made the first recorded attempt to project pictures onto a wall by means of his "Magic Lantern." Following Peter Mark Roget's theorization of the *persistence of vision* (1824), a principle actually known to classical artists, according to which images are only ever perceived as moving thanks to the eye's tendency to briefly retain an image after it has been perceived, a plethora of optical contrivances were devised.

The first actual marriage of drawing and photography took place in 1896, when the cartoonist James Stuart Blackton drew a sequence of images and Thomas Edison photographed them as a progressive series.

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The paragraphs that follow outline the main stages of both the traditional and the digital animation processes. Since Miyazaki, over the arc of his career as an animator and director, has played varyingly important roles in, and experimented with, several aspects of animation, it seems highly relevant, in the present context, to outline the principal steps through which an idea is gradually translated into an animated film. Also important, in this respect, is a basic grasp of some of the technological tools that enable contemporary practices and methodologies.

It should first be noted that all forms of animation comprise a set of basic phases:

Concept— This is the pivotal controlling idea on the basis of which stylistic and technical decisions about the execution of an animated movie are made.

Design— This refers to the visualization of the preliminary concept through the drawing of storyboards, namely sequences of pictures (analogous to comic books) that

show how the story will be articulated in terms of a specific graphic-pictorial language, how the action will develop, what camera angles may be most appropriate to its capture, and where characters fit in all of this.

Model sheets— These outline the attributes of individual characters in accordance with the movie's overall style — which, in turn, may amalgamate images derived from other animated features with disparate elements of popular culture and allusions to the work of famous painters and illustrators.

As Williams observes, animators may opt for *straight-ahead animation*, where no systematic planning is implemented and images are therefore likely to exhibit a sense of natural fluidity, spontaneity and improvisational vitality but may suffer from inconsistencies in character presentation and in the timing of shots; *pose-by-pose animation*, where structured and logical planning will deliver clear and well-defined but possibly excessively clinical and static drawings; or — ideally — a *synthesis* of these two methods in which planning is initially undertaken in order to establish guidelines and a basic structure (by means of image boards, thumbnail sketches and drawings of the key moments of a story) and straight-ahead runs for all the parts of the story are then executed in accordance with the stipulated blueprint (Williams 2001, pp. 61–63).

The production of an animated feature is never definitively completed until the exhibition stage, as the initial concept remains always open to scrutiny and revision. Furthermore, as Ed Hooks has argued, "a good animator must go through the ... process of motivating his characters on a moment-to-moment basis, but she must keep recreating the same moment over and over and over again, sometimes for weeks on end, while she captures it on the page or computer screen. Actors learn that once a moment has gone, it's gone for good, but animators have to pitch camp at the intersections of movement and emotion" (Hooks 2000, p. 5). There is a sense in which animators themselves become akin to actors, in that — by articulating their characters in terms of the relationship between physical actions and affective reactions — they have to develop, and even identify with, particular types of performance.

At the same time, characters, too, are comparable to actors. Indeed, animators must conceive of their creatures as performers, imagining not merely their superficial appearance but also their hypothetical backdrop — namely, elements such as age, provenance, ethics, tastes. A number of factors pertaining to different types of movement and to resulting attitudes must be taken into consideration while building a character along these lines. As Williams maintains throughout his seminal *Animator's Survival Kit*, the principal elements of cartoon characterization include:

- walks;
- runs, skips and jumps;
- flexibility;
- weight;
- anticipation;
- takes and accents;
- timing;
- dialogue.

The various ingredients of the animation process outlined above will be exemplified in detail with reference to illustrative characters and movies.

The stratagems that enable animators to endow their creations with vitality are often quite simple, but their deft handling can engender staggering results. For example, leaning or twisting a character's body, flopping its knees in and out, tilting its belt line or breaking its joints at the appropriate point and in unexpected ways can achieve more than any amount of state-of-the-art SFX (special effects) can. At the same time, it is crucial to reflect at all stages of the animation process on the specific details — however minute and apparently insignificant these may seem — which establish a character's *difference*: the distinctive traits that make that character an individualized being with a recognizable personality. This is particularly important in the realm of *animé*, where characters are often designed according to formulae which would seem to leave little leeway for originality. It is indeed one of the most remarkable aspects of Hayao Miyazaki's art that his characters are thoroughly individuated and distinct even where striking physical resemblances may threaten to make them indistinguishable. For example, Nausicaä (*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*) and Fio (*Porco Rosso*) exhibit somatic similarities, but it is preposterous to assume that even the least sympathetic spectator would mistake one for the other. Also worthy of notice, in this respect, is Miyazaki's ability to differentiate his elderly characters both studiously and affectionately despite their superficial affinities. Thus, one would not dream of confusing Bertha (*Kiki's Delivery Service*) and Old Sophie (*Howl's Moving Castle*), or Uncle Pom (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky*) and the Clocktower Caretaker (*Kiki).*

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In traditional cel animation, before the actual animation process begins, a soundtrack is recorded to which the action may be precisely synchronized. Because of the diligently paced and methodical fashion in which traditional animation is created, it is more practical to synchronize the movements to prerecorded sounds than sounds to preestablished movements. The dialogue is recorded on tape and then transferred onto a magnetic filmstrip which is analyzed in a sound reader, whereby every single syllable can be registered on an *exposure sheet* divided into many rows, each of which corresponds to one frame of film. Music and special sound effects are not normally recorded until after the movie has gone through the final cut. If the budget allows, an *animatic* is made once the soundtrack has been prepared. This consists of pictures extrapolated from the storyboards synchronized to the soundtrack and allows the animators and directors to figure out the timing of a sequence; it is vitally important for each frame to match accurately whatever happens to be going on in the soundtrack at the moment that frame appears. It is at the next stage that the animation proper begins.

In traditional animation, artists begin by drawing sequences of images one picture — or *frame*— at a time. The *key animator* draws the *keyframes* (or *extremes*) that designate especially significant points in a sequence, and the assistant animators then produce the frames situated between any two keyframes. The outcome of this process, known as *tweening*, is a fluid sequence of images. *In-betweens* are extremely important since, unless the in-between animators adhere to the stylistic features established by the extremes, the result will be a wobbly picture — as notoriously demonstrated by the use

of frames where a character's eyes are alternately circular and oval. Once a sequence has been drawn, all the pictures — except background images — are transferred from paper to transparent sheets of plastic, namely *cels* (so-called because they used to be made of celluloid although they are now made of acetate). The outlines of the images are first inked onto the cels and colors subsequently added to them. When a complete sequence of images has been transferred to cels, production enters the photography stage. All the cels involved in each frame of the sequence are stacked in layers, with the background images at the bottom of the pile, and the composite image is photographed. The cels are then removed and the process is reenacted for the next frame until each single frame in the sequence has been photographed. *Registration holes* (small holes along the top or bottom edge of the cel) allow the cel to be placed on pegs before the camera and be precisely aligned with the one before it, so as to avoid jittery transitions.

Every second of finished film consists of 24 frames and usually requires between 12 and 24 drawings, depending on the intended speed of the represented movement. When animators work with *ones*, they have one exposure for each frame and hence 24 drawings per second; when they work with *twos*, they have two exposures for each frame and hence 12 drawings per second. Twos generally work well for normally paced action (which constitutes the bulk of the animator's work) and for normal spacing (various drawings of an object are placed closely together when the object in question is supposed to move slowly) and have the advantage of halving the volume of work. However, ones are more appropriate — and more desirable despite their greater laboriousness — for fast or very smooth action and for far-apart spacing (various drawings of an object are placed far apart when the object is supposed to move rapidly). *Animé* artists often endeavor to keep the number of frames per second down to the bare minimum, using camera techniques instead to convey the illusion of movement, for the purposes of both time and cost effectiveness. What is vital to remember is that even though the difference between two successive frames may be almost indiscernible, failure to record even a one-millimeter shift may result in a disorienting impression of disjointedness.

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Digital animation can be broadly described as the art of creating moving images via computers using both 2D and 3D graphics. Depending on the complexity of the image, animators will either draw it directly in the computer or manipulate digitally scannings of physical models. Digital animation comprises two main approaches to the medium. In one case, the two-dimensional look characteristic of the art of drawing (upon which animation is essentially based) is retained. Computers are used to manipulate images and to achieve visual and special effects that could not be achieved by traditional means, without effacing the two-dimensionality of the materials in hand. In the other case, digital technology is implemented in order to endow two-dimensional images with three-dimensionality by translating 2D drawings into 3D computer objects.

Although at times Studio Ghibli uses 3D digital objects such as wiremesh frames, it essentially follows the former modality, being devoted to the preservation of an overall

look that fosters the drawn and the painterly over the sculptural. The principal digital techniques used at Ghibli include:

- *Compositing:* A process whereby separate elements (i.e. photographic images) are filmed, scanned into a computer and combined onto a piece of film.
- *Morphing:* A special effect used to produce a smooth transformation from one object or shape to another. An image is scanned into the computer and digitally manipulated, sometimes by being combined with wholly virtual images, and then integrated into a piece of animated footage.
- *Particle systems:* A procedural animation technique designed to manipulate clusters of objects. For example, a bunch of points can be instructed to move like a cloud, a waft of smoke or a gush of steam.
- *Ray tracing:* A technique that can give the impression of computer-generated objects being touched by light beams in the same way as corporeal entities would in the real world.
- *Rendering:* A technique that outputs each single pixel until all the computer-generated images in a film are assembled. The virtual scene, immersed in virtual light, is recorded by a virtual camera. Rendering requires massive processing resources.
- *Texture-mapping:* The process of superimposing a 2D texture or pattern (simulating the appearance of numerous substances) over the surface of a 3D graphic object.

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In the domain of digital cinematography, animation does not merely pertain to techniques used to bring cartoon-like characters to life. In fact, it permeates the entire film-making apparatus, playing a crucial role in the rendition of both architectural and organic structures. The importance of animation in digital cinematography points to an intriguing shift in the history of film, which Lev Manovich has described as a partial return to the medium's infancy. Manovich maintains that the early techniques from which cinema evolved "all relied on hand-painted or hand-drawn images" and that "[i]t was not until the last decade of the nineteenth century that the automatic generation of images and their automatic projection were finally combined." It was at this point that the art of animation came to be banished to the very periphery of the history of moving images: "[o]nce the cinema was stabilized as a technology, it cut all references to its origins in artifice" and animation became a "bastard relative." What cinema seemed to disapprove of most was animation's most distinctive feature: namely, the fact that it "foregrounds its artificial character, openly admitting that its images are mere representations," where cinema, by contrast, "works hard to erase any traces of its own production process.... It denies that the reality it shows often does not exist outside of the film image." Over the past two decades, however, the rapid expansion of digital tools and their increasing deployment by the film industry have meant that the techniques marginalized by cinema in order to efface its artificiality (e.g. front and rear projection,

matte paintings, green-screen and blue-screen photography) have been regaining pivotal status: the "[m]anual construction and animation of images gave birth to cinema and slipped into the margins ... only to reappear as the foundation of digital cinema. The history of the moving image thus makes a full circle. Born from animation, cinema pushed animation to its boundary, only to become one particular case of animation in the end" (Manovich 2001).

All animation contains an obvious element of unreality — even at its most mimetic — and this makes it a much more self-reflexive art than other visual media devoted to concealing the processes of production. Spectators perceive the animated film as a flow of interconnected images, but even the viewer least versed in technical matters is liminally aware of the *invisible* work that takes place between frames in order to convey the illusion of a dynamic reality and of continuity and — by implication — must be conscious of the animation's constructedness. The very knowledge that a movie is an animation points to its artificial status, to the materiality of the image and to the process of its construction.

Accordingly, animation is almost completely disengaged from the constraints of live-action cinema in the creation of its imaginary universes and personas. No character or location is ever, strictly speaking, under any obligation to remain the same for long. In this respect, the medium could be regarded as the perfect embodiment of what J.P. Telotte has termed cinema's "robotic fantasy," namely the deployment of techniques that allow for the representation of a "seductive view of the self as fantasy, able to be shaped and reshaped, defined and redefined at our will" (Telotte 1995, p. 51). Few directors of animated movies have realized this vision as vividly as Miyazaki has in the generation of his fluid and protean universes. It is important to appreciate, incidentally, that the term "self" does not here refer to the individual valorized by liberal humanism but rather to any cultural manifestation of subjectivity at both the personal and the collective levels, to include whole worlds and corresponding ideologies. The unceasing redefinition of the self theorized by Telotte, therefore, alludes to the inherent mutability of animation's milieus in their entirety. Paul Wells maintains that "metamorphosis" indeed represents "the constituent core" of the medium in that it "legitimizes the process of connecting apparently unrelated images, forging original relationships between lines, objects, etc., and disrupting established notions of classical story-telling" (Wells 1998, p. 69). Metamorphosis is undeniably a key ingredient of the typical Miyazakian recipe.

Thus, although the animation process involves highly demanding and labor-intensive schedules (as evinced by several documentaries covering Studio Ghibli's production diaries), the rewards it yields are considerable. As Jenny Roche points out, "the visual challenges of animation are immense," yet the freedoms it affords are potentially limitless for "there is no set which is too expensive or exotic; there is no stunt which is too difficult ... the scientific laws of physics, biology and chemistry are no restriction either" (Roche 1999, pp. 137–138). The joy of animation lies precisely in its flouting of the conventions and expectations of mimetic art. Concurrently, however, Miyazaki aims to bring to life worlds that are nonetheless believable in terms of their internal logic, and this is what makes his art uniquely tantalizing.

The director's take on environmental issues is a particularly telling instance of his careful handling of the relationship between realism and fantasy. Most importantly, he refuses to impose definitive conclusions — of either the utopian or the cataclysmic varieties — onto the dramatization of those problems, aware that time and history as they are actually experienced never constitute neat bundles of meaning. In this respect, the films could be said to echo Frank Kermode's hypotheses concerning apocalyptic fictions. In *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode maintains that in speculating about the end, apocalyptic thinkers aim at imposing a pattern on history, thus enabling "a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle" (Kermode 1968, p. 17). Therefore, those ruminations should not be regarded as actual predictions about the future but rather as attempts to make sense of temporality, to produce "an organization which humanizes time by giving it a form" (p. 45). Time in its unadulterated state, however, is disorganized, and all human fictions are ultimately precarious efforts to overcome this disorganization by forcing it into a structure endowed with both an inception and a closure. *The Sense of an Ending* advocates the desirability of engaging with time in its as yet unformalized state as a means of moving beyond the consolation of form and beginning to experiment with what Kermode calls "virtual time" (p. 52). Miyazaki's movies consistently engage with this complex and compelling version of temporality by laying emphasis on elements of instability, open-endedness and even residual disharmony rather than on wholly recuperative compensations.

2

The Early Years

Miyazaki's Encounter with Comics and Animation

Hayao Miyazaki was born in the Bunkyo-ho district of Tokyo on January 5, 1941. His father, Katsuji Miyazaki, was employed as an executive at the factory, owned by Hayao's uncle, that constructed parts for the Japanese fighter planes deployed in World War II. This familial background is most likely to be the source of the director's passion for aviation and flying machines of all sorts. Hayao's mother was no less profound an influence, as evinced by the fact that it is largely upon her personality that Miyazaki has based the courageous, energetic and autonomous female characters so typical of his films. It is also noteworthy that in the course of Miyazaki's school years — coinciding with the reconstruction phase of the occupation of Japan — his mother was afflicted with spinal tuberculosis for protracted periods, and hence forced to spend at least two years in hospital. This experience, which undoubtedly lies at the roots of the story dramatized in the semi-autobiographical movie *My Neighbor Totoro*, motivated Hayao to share a number of domestic duties with his siblings — he still cooks with alacrity for his colleagues at the studio, especially at times when gruelling production schedules force the staff to barely leave the premises except to get some sleep.

Miyazaki was one of the many postwar Japanese youths who fancied a career as a comic-book artist, and Osamu Tezuka (1928–1989) was, unequivocally, the most powerful role model available. Exposed to *manga* and animation from an early age thanks to the encouragement of a liberal family, Tezuka had been a witty and imaginative boy, and indeed used his intellectual qualities as a protection against the playground bullying to which he was assiduously subjected. As stated in the official website dedicated to Tezuka,[1] his "*manga* and animated films had a tremendous impact on the shaping of Japan's postwar youth. His work changed the concept of the Japanese cartoon" and "also influenced a range of other genres" ("Osamu Tezuka Online"). While a keen sensitivity to the value of human life sharpened by his exposure to World War II prompted the young Tezuka to wish to become a physician, and although he did indeed obtain the intended qualification, his original calling eventually led him back to *manga* and

animation. Tezuka's first success was the publication, in his native Osaka, of *Shintakarajima* (*New Treasure Island*), a comic book that already exhibits the graphic quality and dynamism of subsequent animations. Tezuka was thereafter approached by several Tokyo publishers and the *manga* he produced proved so successful that most artists began to mimic his style. Tezuka was deeply hurt by the opposition to *manga* mounted by Japanese parents and teachers, for his intention was always to inspire children, not to deaden their imagination.

Tezuka's most popular characters were *Tetsuwan Atom* (*Astro Boy*), *Ribon Ni Kishi* (*Princess Knight*), and *Jungle Emperor Leo* (*Kimba the White Lion*: most probably, the character upon which Disney's *Lion King* is based, though the American company adamantly refused to acknowledge the debt). These began life as the protagonists of *manga* that were subsequently adapted, with their creator's consistent involvement, as TV series, and were often exported worldwide. Tezuka also wrote *manga* for adults, where emphasis was placed primarily on abstract ideas and on artistic values — e.g. *The Phoenix*, a work inspired by Buddhist concepts; an adaptation of the *Arabian Nights*; and *The Three Adolphs*, a political drama set in pre–World War II Japan. Tezuka was still drawing on his deathbed in hospital, and by the end of his life he had produced a total of about 17,000 pages of *manga*, 700 stories, 12 TV specials and 21 TV series. So widespread was his popularity that after his death, the Japanese mail service devoted two stamps to the artist — one depicting an autocaricature and the other a portrait of Tezuka in the company of his most famous characters.

The *manga* master's reputation was so great and ubiquitous that it rapidly became the cause of a serious case of "anxiety of influence" for the young Miyazaki. It was not until he was appointed as an animator by the studio Toei Animation Studios that Miyazaki began to free himself of the illustrious predecessor's hold on his imagination. It is intriguingly felicitous, in this regard, that the award of the Oscar to Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* should have coincide with the 40th anniversary of the debut of Tezuka's *Astro Boy*.

Miyazaki's early attraction to animation was fuelled by his exposure to Japan's first color animated feature, *Legend of the White Serpent* (*Hakujaden*; dir. Taiji Yabushita, 1958) and especially to its heroine, Bai-Niang, with whom he admitted to having literally fallen in love (Miyazaki 1988a). Other major influences on Miyazaki's work include the American artist Winsor McCay, author of the early 20th-century comic strips *Little Nemo in Slumberland* and *Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend*, and creator of Gertie the Dinosaur (1913), the first successful cartoon; Max Fleischer, the American animator that created Betty Boop (first appearance: 1930) and was the leading proponent of a style that foregrounded the drawn character of the medium; the French animation *The Shepherdess and the Chimneysweeper* (*La Bergère et le Ramoneur*; dir. Paul Grimault, 1952), a production that showed Miyazaki how an animated film could be legitimately targeted at an adult audience, while also affecting Cagliostro's architectural look; the Russian animated feature *Snow Queen* (*Snezhnaya Koroleva*; dir. Lev Atamanov, 1957), a film that strengthened the director's determination to commit himself to animation at a time of self-doubt, and inspired the characterization of the King and Hilda in Hols;

Frédéric Back, the Canadian animator and illustrator (among many other works) of Jean Giono's *The Man Who Planted Trees* (1954), from whom Miyazaki derived the flair for drawing and animating plants; the Russian animator Yuri Norstein, author of *Tale of Tales* (1979); and several writers from Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) through Maurice Leblanc (1864–1941) to contemporary authors such as Eiko Kadono and Diana Wynne Jones. While objecting to the narrative approach adopted by Disney productions, with their neat endings and stark good/evil dichotomies, Miyazaki has nonetheless frequently admitted to liking early Disney shorts such as *Silly Symphonies* (1934).

In 1963, upon leaving the prestigious Gakushuin University (where he had read politics and economics but concurrently derived great pleasure and invaluable sources of inspiration from his involvement in the Children's Literature Research Society), Miyazaki joined Toei Animation Studios. In this context, the young animator played a very active role as a trade union organizer and met Isao Takahata, the man with whom he would share his future career to this day. In 1965, Takahata started working on *The Adventures of Hols, Prince of the Sun*, a.k.a. *Little Norse Prince Valiant* (*Taiyou no Ouji — Horusu no Daibouken*) in a directorial role; and Miyazaki was given the opportunity to contribute to the project as scene designer and key animator. The film was completed three years later, at once supplying evidence for its makers' skills and for their employers' lack of adventurousness. As Patrick Drazen observes:

> *Prince of the Sun* has a brilliant look about it that defines it as a mature work. However, the bosses at Toei either didn't know quality when they saw it, or felt the need to stick it to union types like Takahata and Miyazaki. *Prince of the Sun* was shown in Japanese theatres for exactly 10 days. The box office receipts were predictably small, and Toei used the poor showing to attack director Takahata [Drazen 2003, p. 256].

Toei ultimately proved far too restrictive a context for both Miyazaki and his *nakama* (partner) Takahata for the simple reason that the company's rules and objectives were invariably accorded total priority. As Miyazaki himself has explained, "The company told us various things, such as 'kids would love to see small animals,' or 'well, you say so, but unless you do a well-known classic story, tickets won't sell'" (Miyazaki 1995b).

In 1971, after working on *Ali Baba* (a subversive version of the tale from the *Arabian Nights* that turns the now wealthy Ali into a villain), Miyazaki moved to A-Pro Studios with Takahata. Two years later, both started work at Nippon Animation, where Miyazaki took a substantial role in the production of the animated television series *World Masterpiece Theatre* for a period of five years. This was underpinned by extensive travel around Europe in order to obtain firsthand impressions of the landscapes in which the stories comprised in the series — namely, classics of Western literature — would be set. In 1978 he directed *Conan, Boy of the Future*, his first TV series, and in 1979 he moved again — this time to Toho Studios, where he would direct his first feature film, *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro*.

From 1969 onwards, Miyazaki also engaged in the production of various *manga*, including a number of series which would either provide the foundations for, or run in parallel to, filmic productions.[2]

The truly momentous turning point in Miyazaki's career took place in 1984, when he released *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, a film based on the *manga* of the same title he had been working on since 1982 and to which he would intermittently go on applying himself until 1994. *Nausicaä* was such an unprecedented success that it led to the foundation of Studio Ghibli, the company responsible for the production of some of the most popular and acclaimed Japanese movies in history — most notably, to date, *Princess Mononoke* (Japan Academy Award for Best Film) and *Spirited Away* (Academy Award for Best Animated Feature and Golden Bear Best Picture Prize).

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Miyazaki believes that many people involved in the animation industry today seem to have no qualms in placing fashionable tastes above all aesthetic and ethical considerations, assuming, in Miyazaki's own words, that if "this is the trend," then "this is likely to be a hit." Miyazaki is quite simply not prepared to acquiesce to these callous priorities:

> I can't engage myself in such an inhuman task as making animated cartoons just to produce such things. To produce a decent animated cartoon requires anything from a year to a year and a half, and our private lives go out the window during this period. Of course, we could make cartoons while still taking our vacations, but that would be reflected in their quality. Works of art are created by those who are prepared to go to the limit [Miyazaki 1991, pp. 7–8].

The state of affairs decried by Miyazaki is largely a corollary of the staggering rate at which *animé* has been proliferating over the past few decades in accordance with the imperatives of quantity and lucre and little interest in speculation and reflection. "Compared to several works in the 1950s which inspired me," the director has stated, "we ... make animation as if it's an in-flight meal served on a Jumbo jet.... The craft that we should put our love into has been worn down in the piecework production system.... *Animé* is more suitable to being discussed together with computer games, foreign cars, or playing gourmet." Concurrently, Miyazaki has commented on the impoverished intellectual and emotional content of much recent *animé* and suggested that this phenomenon is symptomatic of the alarmingly generalized dumbing down of contemporary postindustrial societies:

> Among all popular culture, *animé* is probably the one that kept its preoccupation with love and justice the longest.... Today, creators can no longer give heroes spontaneous motives. It seems that ... we have just accepted the vanity of human effort in this managed society. Our old enemy "poverty" somehow disappeared, and we can no longer find an enemy to fight against. The only remaining motive is ... professionalism. Characters fight because they are robot soldiers, pursue criminals because they are police, beat competitors because they want to be singers, or work hard because they are sports players [Miyazaki 1988b].

While lamenting this dire attenuation of ideals and aspirations, Miyazaki steers clear of commending any one ideological agenda, led by his own personal disillusionment with revolutionary politics to beware of any codified system of thought. Profoundly influenced

by Marxist theories in his youth, as attested to by his activities as chairman of the Animators Union at Toei Animation Studios, Miyazaki has gradually developed an acute aversion to the notion of slavishly adhering to any one doctrine and sought instead to pursue broadly pacifist and egalitarian principles. To this effect, he stated that in the 1990s, he "totally forsook Marxism" as a result of having "stopped seeing things by class. It's a lie that one is right just because he/she is a laborer. The general public do many stupid things. I can't trust politics" (Miyazaki 1994).

The director's own objectives and values are fully attested to by his (and his studio's) unremitting devotion to the creation of high-quality features that refuse to pander to exclusively financial imperatives, and hence to kowtow to the vapid requirements of fashion. The films endeavor, in fact, to throw into relief a variety of complex, and deliberately unresolved, issues of concurrently ethical and aesthetic resonance that impact at once on private and public levels of experience. Content and form are treated with equal respect and with equally conscientious levels of commitment, as thematic richness and technical expertise continually interact and merge in mutual suffusion.

Miyazaki's movies are spellbinding in their power to capture the audience's attention and to bewitch their imagination with a dexterity worthy of a Yu-Baaba or a Howl. At the same time, Miyazaki's art is also spellbinding to the extent that it is capable of binding — in the sense of both bringing together and mastering — a wide range of technical and poetic formulae. Thus, while the films challenge their viewers by defamiliarizing conventional expectations through the spectacle of magic, they concurrently challenge the wizardry of the technologies they so imaginatively and adventurously deploy.

Pre-Ghibli Productions

Miyazaki was involved in various capacities since the early 1960s in the production of numerous animated features and episodes of TV series. These included the jobs of key animator, in-betweener, subject organizer, scene designer and storyboard artist. A comprehensive list of relevant works and of the roles fulfilled by Miyazaki in their production is provided in Filmography. A selection of works which marked particularly important moments in Miyazaki's early career are worthy of consideration here.

Films

The feature film *Gulliver's Space Travels (Garibaa no Uchuu Ryokou*, 1965*)* was arguably the first movie in which Miyazaki fully displayed his creative flair. Although his role was merely that of in-betweener, he bravely took it upon himself to propose alterations to the script and animated the modified scenes. At the end, for example, Gulliver was originally intended to rescue a robot princess of the Robot Country. Miyazaki amended the ending so that the artificial shell encasing the princess would crack open and reveal a human princess within, thus redefining the movie's entire message. What the altered ending involves is that the robots are actually people imprisoned in mechanical bodies and

that they have a chance of regaining their humanity if abetted by disinterested sympathy and courage.

The Adventures of Hols, Prince of the Sun, a.k.a. *Little Norse Prince Valiant* (*Taiyou no Ouji — Horusu no Daibouken*, 1968), a frank exposure of the realities of life and death at their starkest, strikes its roots in northern European folklore and revolves around a fisherman's brave son and his struggle to vanquish the evil Grunwald the Frost King. The film, to which Miyazaki contributed in the roles of scene designer and key animator, laid the foundations of his style in many ways. The beginning of the movie overtly anticipates *Conan, Boy of the Future* (1978), the first TV series which Miyazaki directed. Hols, moreover, is the prototype behind not only Conan but also Pazu from *Laputa.* The heroine, Hilda, is possibly one of the most complex female characters in the entire arc of Japanese animation history and could be regarded as the archetypal encapsulation of the typical Miyazaki heroine. Hilda is a subtle fusion of good and evil forces which, in Miyazaki's later movies, will often not be ascribed to a single heroine but rather reapportioned to a complementary pair: for instance, Nausicaä and Kushana in *Nausicaä,* Clarisse and Fujiko in *Cagliostro,* San and Eboshi in *Mononoke*, Chihiro and Yu-Baaba in *Spirited Away*, Sophie and Suliman in *Howl*. *Hols* also exhibits an overtly political dimension which made Miyazaki's and Takahata's bosses at Toei feel rather uncomfortable about the film's overall message. Public perceptions of the movie would only have served to exacerbate their feelings of apprehension since, as Patrick Drazen has observed, "The exhortations of Hols to the villagers to unite against the minions of the Frost King were received as thinly disguised rallying cries by the union and college student protesters disrupting the streets of Tokyo in those heady days" (Drazen 2003, p. 256).

Puss in Boots (*Nagagutsu wo Haita Neko*, 1969), to which Miyazaki contributed the key animation, is often regarded as a masterpiece of comedy animation in Japan. This film is almost certainly the prototype behind *Cagliostro*, with which it specifically shares a profusion of slapstick antics interspersed with darker elements: for example, the opening sequence, where the cats in pursuit of the protagonist are threatened with the prospect of being hanged unless they apprehend him. The closing twenty minutes, moreover, are likely to have inspired the climactic finale of *Cagliostro* staged in the clocktower.

The Flying Ghost Ship (*Soratobu Yuureisen*, 1969), on which Miyazaki also worked as key animator, could be regarded as an early expression — destined to find full articulation in films such as *Nausicaä*, *Laputa*, *Porco Rosso*, *Princess Mononoke* and *Howl's Moving Castle*— of his abhorrence of military violence and totalitarian control, vividly dramatized in the sequences (both proposed and animated by Miyazaki himself) showing tanks cruising and shooting through the center of Tokyo.

Animal Treasure Island (*Doubutsu Takarajima*, 1971), to which Miyazaki contributed both key animation and subject organization, is a comedy-adventure film based on R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. All the characters feature in animal guise with the exception of Jim and Kathy. While Kathy anticipates the tenacious and dauntless heroines of Miyazaki's later work, Captain John Silver, a mean-looking pig, might be considered a distant ancestor of Porco.

Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves (*Aribaba to 40-ppiki no Touzoku*, 1971) is a farcical sequel to the classic story from the *Arabian Nights*. The film is endowed with a distinctive graphic vigor that indubitably owes much to Miyazaki's key animation and choreography. Although *Ali Baba* contains significantly more cartoonish character designs and backgrounds than one might have expected of Miyazaki's pen, these are entirely suitable to the movie's sense of humor and narrative enthusiasm.

The Adventures of Panda and Friends (*Panda Kopanda*, 1972) is a short film for which Miyazaki provided the concept, the screenplay, set design and key animation. The panda whose everyday adventures the film hinges upon — Papa Panda or *Papanda-San* — is most definitely Totoro's visual predecessor and the character of the little girl, Mimiko, that accommodates Papa and his child — *Kopanda* — is reminiscent of both Mei and Satsuki in stylistic and thematic terms. How deeply *Panda Kopanda* and its sequel — *Panda and Child: Rainy Day Circus* (*Panda Kopanda — Amefuri Saakasu no Maki*, 1973) — must have influenced Miyazaki's subsequent work is borne out precisely by their impact on that later creation, and its rise to a position so central to his output as to have been adopted as the core of Studio Ghibli's logo.

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TV Series

World Masterpiece Theatre (*Sekai Meisaku Gekijou*), a series of adaptations of classic children's books of Western provenance, has been considered a veritable gem of Japanese animation for television since its inception in the mid–1970s. Each series normally lasted a year and comprised between 50 and 52 weekly episodes.

Miyazaki contributed specifically to *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (*Arupusu no Shoujo Haiji*, January 6, 1974–December 29, 1974), *Three Thousand Miles In Search of Mother* (*Haha wo Tazunete Sanzen-Ri*, January 4, 1976–December 26, 1976) and *Anne of Green Gables* (*Akage no An*, January 7, 1979–December 30, 1979) in the capacities of scene designer and scene organizer, and to *A Dog of Flanders* (*Furandaasu no Inu*, January 5, 1975–December 28, 1975) and *Rascal the Raccoon* (*Araiguma Rasukaru*, January 2, 1977–December 25, 1977) in the role of key animator.

Heidi was based on the novel by Johanna Spyri, published in 1880, which recounted a young girl's conflicting experiences of life in the pure climate of the mountains and in the oppressive atmosphere of the city, thus anticipating the environmental concerns destined to become a signature of Miyazaki's work. Inspired by the short story originally published as part of Edmondo de Amicis's *Cuore* (1886), *Three Thousand Miles in Search of Mother* foreshadows another theme which would subsequently acquire a central place in Miyazaki's output, namely that of the journey as a metaphor for concurrent physical and psychological development. Anne, the eponymous heroine of a novel series by Lucy Maude Montgomery published in the early 1900s, exhibits many of the distinctive traits with which Miyazaki has endowed the female protagonists of succeeding productions, relying on her intelligence, independence and pluck to adjust to an unexpected life as an

orphan in the company of an elderly bachelor and his spinster sister. Finally, both *A Dog of Flanders*— based on the story by Marie Louise De La Ramée (1872) celebrating the affectionate bond between an innocent and destitute boy and his faithful dog Patrash,— and *Rascal*,— inspired by the autobiographical novel by Sterling North (1963) in which the author recounts the tale of his childhood friendship with a raccoon in early 20th-century America — gave Miyazaki opportunity to elaborate on another topos that is seldom far from his heart: the importance of friendship and solidarity over and above any form of purely material success.

Conan, Boy of the Future (*Mirai Shounen Konan*, April 4, 1978–October 31, 1978) was the first TV series which Miyazaki directed and exhibits overt parallels with *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and with *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, as well as more elliptical affinities with *Princess Mononoke*. *Conan* is set in a post-futuristic world emanating from the planet's utter devastation by World War III (2008). Two decades later, the time period in which the film is set, a vast ocean fills most of the space once occupied by the Earth's continents. Conan and his grandfather are among the very few survivors of the catastrophe and its aftermath, and the sole inhabitants of an island that was once a mountain. The core of the action hinges upon Conan's search for and rescue of Lana, a girl whose father is supposed to be the only extant scientist capable of tracing the satellite, sent in space before the war, that could regenerate the planet by means of solar energy.

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Lupin III: the Castle of Cagliostro

As the first feature film directed by Miyazaki, *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979) deserves special attention in the present context. Though made on a relatively small budget, *Cagliostro* nonetheless evinces the meticulous attention to detail and elegant design destined to become the most distinctive features of the director's later productions. These qualities were indeed internationally recognized as the movie received the Award for Best Animated Feature at the Cannes Film Festival.

Combining many of the familiar codes and conventions of slapstick comedy, romance, the thriller and action-adventure, this film is much more light-hearted and summery than any of the director's later productions at Studio Ghibli. Yet, the movie does contain in embryonic form several visual devices and themes to be later developed by Miyazaki to maximum effect. Notably, the film offers a gargantuan profusion of aerial acrobatics which exuberantly foreshadow some of the most memorable action sequences to be found in *Nausicaä*, *Laputa*, *Kiki*, *Porco*, *Spirited Away* and *Howl*. The comic dimension, moreover, is repeatedly tempered by darker undercurrents: sober reflections upon the vicissitudes that attend the individual's social and psychological development, a recognition of the fallaciousness of romantically reparative conclusions, and a keen awareness of the inevitably precarious character of any state of equilibrium between the natural environment and human civilization.

The plot follows Lupin and his sidekick Jigen as they travel to the sleepily picturesque European duchy of Cagliostro and come to the aid of Clarisse, the young lady promised in marriage to the diabolical Count Cagliostro. The director's distinctive cinematographical stamp can be noticed in the use of audacious angles intended to capture the characters in unusual postures and from unexpected perspectives. This is especially true of the film's tantalizing chases. Distinctive walking and running styles are consistently used as a means of establishing the peculiar characteristics of various dramatis personae. This is most notable in the opening sequence, where Lupin and Jigen are shown running from the casino they have just robbed towards their Fiat 500, carrying massive sacks of money. The action is choreographed in terms of a rhythmically controlled alternation of short trots and huge leaps, performed by the two characters with flawless coordination. This pattern of motion encapsulates the spirit of Lupin's exploits, evoking his passion for action and adventure not only as a means to lucre but also as ends in themselves, and expresses this attitude through an emphasis on flamboyant and vigorous, yet elegant, athleticism. There are occasions when, in order to corroborate this sense of all-pervasive vitality, inanimate objects themselves are seemingly imparted with life: an unforgettable touch, in this respect, is the image of the little Fiat in the aftermath of the first chase sequence appearing to "snore" when its exhausted owners finally go to sleep inside it. Lupin's flair for exuberantly theatrical outbursts of self-dramatization is paradigmatically conveyed, later in the movie, by his delivery of the "knight-in-shining-armor" spiel.

Miyazaki's signature is also instantly recognizable in his handling of architectural and geographical features. Anticipating *Laputa*, *Kiki*, *Spirited Away* and *Howl*, the buildings portrayed in the film — especially Cagliostro's multi-layered castle, with its dungeon, esoterically adorned chambers, intricate reservoir system and stately gardens, and the grandiose clock tower wherein massive gears menacingly churn — bear witness to the director's painstaking approach to the planning and individuation of cinematic places and spaces as locations sui generis unconstrained by the laws of real-world architecture.

As for the characterization of Cagliostro's country, its admixture of pastoral innocence and sophistication, idyllic visions painted in bright hues and a foreboding atmosphere of time-encrusted secrets, closely reflects the Japanese notion of *akogare no Paris* ("the Paris of our dreams") — namely, an elaborately fantasized version of Europe as seen "through Eastern eyes." Indeed, the setting is essentially a fantastic synthesis of diverse European locations, simultaneously redolent of the Italian Alps, of Bavarian castles, of Mont-Saint-Michel and of the Côte d'Azur. At the same time, Miyazaki's style can instantly be recognized in the sky's vibrant aliveness, in the rendition of the play of light on water, and in the loving execution of all manner of both natural and cultural details — from the flowers in the fields to the elaborate dishes served at Cagliostro's court.

An important aspect of *Cagliostro*'s architectural dimension lies with the emphasis placed on ruins: primarily those of the old castle and those of the submerged Roman city revealed at the end when the secret locked in the forbidding clocktower has finally been disclosed. Ruins and derelict buildings feature regularly in later Miyazaki movies, from the solitary gardens of *Laputa* to the apparent theme park of *Spirited Away*.

Reflecting on the metaphorical connotations of such locations, it could be argued that cinematic images of dilapidated dwellings and even entire cities evoke a "Gothic" fascination with ruins that corroborates William H. Fox Talbot's observations regarding "the camera's special aptitude for recording 'the injuries of time'" with specific reference, as Susan Sontag points out, to the inevitable fate of "buildings and monuments" (Sontag 1979, p. 69). The attitudes to devastation and decay evoked by the films here studied also confirm Jonathan Jones's account of important historical shifts in the perception of ruination: "In the 18th century, ruins were objects of contemplation, reverie and sober enjoyment. They were an opportunity to reflect on the passing of empires and the vanity of human effort. Yet in an age abandoning its religion, they were also reassuring images of what survives, what remains of us.... [A]rtists took delight in ruins. They drugged on decay" and were acutely drawn by "the broken sensuality of the past." In the 20th and 21st centuries, by contrast, ruins carry substantially different connotations due to the very means by which they tend to come about: "there's a difference between a ruin that is the product of slow centuries, the richly rotting fruit of time, and a building whose ruin takes place in a moment: the difference between dying of old age and murder" (Jones 2001, pp. 12–13). What Miyazaki's movies emphasize is not only the enlightening potential of the confrontation with disintegrating structures but also the iconic value of ruins as reminders of the human penchant for destructiveness, be it entirely mindless or ideologically motivated.

Miyazaki's methods of characterization already point to his predilection for ambiguity — a character trait destined to become pivotal in subsequent features. The hero himself brings together a number of disparate narrative and visual sources. The character of Lupin III was originally created by "Monkey Punch," the pseudonym adopted by the *manga* writer and artist Kazuhiko Kato. Lupin III and related characters from the *manga* had already been made popular by a TV series — *Lupin III* (*Rupan Sansei*) TV Series 1 (October 24, 1971–March 26, 1972) — of which Miyazaki and Takahata had co-directed some episodes. Lupin appeared again in the series *The New Lupin III* TV Series 2 (October 3, 1977–October 6, 1980), to which Miyazaki contributed in two episodes as writer and director under the pseudonym of "Telecom." However, the director sought to adopt a different tone from that of the TV series and of their *manga* antecedent, and hence to endow the protagonist with some admirable qualities even while retaining his relaxed and happy-go-lucky attitude. Whereas the original character was an unscrupulous and rather cynical criminal, Miyazaki's film suggests that the new Lupin has somewhat matured and acquired the ability to act selflessly, acknowledging that certain sacrifices are unavoidable albeit painful. The character's metamorphosis is underscored in a flashback that shows a playfully irresponsible younger version of Lupin on an earlier visit to the castle as an aspiring but rather naive thief. In a mood reminiscent of the closing sequence of *Casablanca*, the finale even intimates that Lupin has attained to something of a heroic stature.

The character of Lupin III was directly inspired by Arséne Lupin, the gentleman-thief created by the novelist Maurice Leblanc (1864–1941) and posited by Monkey Punch as his hero's grandfather. Lupin is a crepuscularly equivocal character, combining a noc-

turnal element of mystery (his origins are unknown) and deceptiveness (he is a veritable master of disguise), and a sunny magnanimity at first concealed by his aloof, hard-boiled mien. As Drazen has noted, the connection between Miyazaki and Leblanc extends beyond Lupin, insofar as the French novelist's portrayal of his gallant outlaw as "a criminal who could challenge Holmes" and his parallel production of "a series of stories about a bumbling British detective named Holmlock Shears" has a correlative in Miyazaki's own "Sherlockian television series" (Drazen 2003, p. 257). *Sherlock Hound* (*Meitantei Houmuzu*) was aired from October 6, 1984 to May 20, 1985, and Miyazaki was involved in the production of six episodes as director and scriptwriter. Other illustrious sources for the character of Lupin III include Batman and the gallant criminal played by Cary Grant in *To Catch a Thief* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1955). The depiction of Lupin as an urbane ladies' man who is also given to athletic exploits, abetted by a gadget-filled belt that gets him out of all sorts of predicaments, is largely indebted to Ian Fleming's James Bond.

While drawing on a variety of fictional characters, Miyazaki also turned to historical sources, particularly in the representation of the evil Count. This character is based on Giuseppe Balsamo (1743–1795), the Italian pseudoaristocrat who went under the name of Count Alessandro of Cagliostro gravitating around the court of Louis XVI of France, and is commonly associated with the history of magic, alchemy and the occult. Like Lupin, the Count is an ambiguous character — darkly repellent but also, perversely perhaps, fascinating in virtue of his utterly amoral lack of values.

Miyazaki's desire to invest his characters with a degree of complexity that their *manga* and TV predecessors did not — and arguably could not given their scope — possess is fully attested to by the characterization of Inspector Zenigata. No longer merely a stooge of Lupin's capers, Zenigata attains to dramatic dignity in his effort to fulfill his task in the face of overwhelming pressures. The film's political dimension is indeed remarkable in the context of a fundamentally light-hearted crime plot. This is articulated around an international connivance, masterminded by the evil Count, in the traffic of counterfeit money, which has had the power to trigger all manner of major events (including the 1929 Depression) and controlled the "global economy for centuries" through "conspiracies and assassinations."

Foreshadowing subsequent productions, *Cagliostro* features a pair of complementary heroines: Clarisse and Fujiko Mine. The princess is largely modelled on the basis of established fairytale typologies and is accordingly portrayed as innocent and defenseless, while Fujiko (a character named after Fuji-yama, Japan's highest mountain) is a seasoned embezzler endowed with quite extraordinary intellectual and physical stamina. However, Miyazaki's aversion to binary oppositions is already evident at this relatively early stage of his career, as Clarisse's stereotypical traits are countered by her intelligence, education and gradual acceptance of her responsibility in managing the future of her land and in ensuring that its treasures, having finally emerged after being occluded for centuries, be shared by all mankind.

3

The Ghibli Era: A Brief History of Studio Ghibli

Studio Ghibli was founded in 1985 to produce *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*. However, the studio's inception can be traced back to 1983, when Tokuma Shoten (the publishing company responsible for the production of *Animage*, the magazine in which Miyazaki had been serializing the *manga Nausicaä* since 1982) decided to produce *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* as a feature-length movie. The film's huge success prompted Tokuma and Miyazaki to establish Studio Ghibli to make their next movie.[1] *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* is here explored in the context of the Ghibli — era though it is not, strictly speaking, a Ghibli production — precisely because of its instrumental role in encouraging the foundation of the studio.

The term "Ghibli" refers to both a hot Sahara wind and the model of the Italian scouting aeroplane used during World War II. It is perhaps unsurprising, given Miyazaki's love of planes and Italy alike, that he should have picked this particular rubric for his studio. (Normally, the studio's name is pronounced as *jiburi* in Japan and as *geeblee* in the West.)

Studio Ghibli is quite unique in its intention, at least in principle, to produce only feature films based on original work. This policy involves considerable financial risks since box-office success can never be automatically guaranteed. It is for this reason that animation studios normally work primarily on TV animation series, only occasionally producing a feature based on an already popular series. (Ghibli's first TV animation, *Ocean Waves* [dir. Tomomi Mochizuki], was not produced until 1993.) As a result, few people believed that Studio Ghibli's chances of financial endurance were high. As Studio Ghibli producer Toshio Suzuki stated in a speech delivered at the Annecy International Animated Film Festival in the summer of 1995, "The idea was to dedicate full energy into each piece of work with sufficient budget and time, never compromising on the quality or content.... To be honest, none of us thought that Studio Ghibli would survive for this long a time. 'Make one film. If that succeeds, make another. If that flops, that ends it'" ("History of Ghibli" 1).

To minimize potential losses, Ghibli did not hire any full-time employees but rather relied on about seventy temporary staff to complete one film at a time. Once the production had reached the exhibition stage, the team would be dismissed. At the time,

the studio's location consisted merely of one rented floor in a building in Kichijoji in a suburb of Tokyo.

Nausicaä, released in 1984, drew around 915,000 people to cinemas, and *Laputa*, released in 1986, attracted around 775,000. The next two films made by Ghibli — to be released in 1988 — were *My Neighbor Totoro* (dir. Miyazaki) and *Grave of the Fireflies* (dir. Takahata). The simultaneous release of two feature-length movies by two highly talented directors gave rise to tremendous levels of pressure and stress, as the quality of neither work could be sacrificed. The idea seemed almost suicidal, yet it was too tantalizing a challenge for Ghibli to miss. The then president of both Studio Ghibli and Tokuma Shoten, Yasuyoshi Tokuma, played a vital role in the promotion of this double-feature venture, despite his customary inclination not to interfere with the studio's activities. As Suzuki has noted, "Tokuma himself went to the distributors, campaigned for the two films, and successfully made an agreement with the distributors to make the release of the two films possible."

The box office performance of neither *Totoro* nor *Fireflies* was especially impressive due to the poor timing of their release outside the popular summer season. Yet the films were highly praised in numerous fields for their outstanding cinematographical quality. *Totoro* won most of the Japanese picture awards in 1988, including Best Photography. However, the greatest financial benefit ushered in by *Totoro* consisted of its unforeseen potential in the field of ancillary merchandise: "the stuffed toys were marketed nearly two years after the release of the film, and they were not intentionally created to promote box office performance. What actually happened was that a stuffed toy manufacturer ardently felt that Totoro was a character that deserved to be made into a stuffed toy and eagerly asked Ghibli for its permission. All in all, thanks to the sale of Totoro goods, it now became possible for Ghibli to continually cover for any deficit in production cost." Although this experience alerted the studio to the immense possibilities inherent in the production and marketing of spin-offs (a topic here addressed in Appendix 1), Suzuki, Miyazaki, Takahata and their colleagues remained fervently committed to the policy that film productions should come first and that merchandising is merely a result — and not an inevitable one for that matter ("History of Ghibli" 2).

The first Ghibli film to achieve Disney-like megasuccess was *Kiki's Delivery Service*, released in 1989. Approximately 2.64 million people saw the film, making it the indisputable number-one hit among all Japanese movies (i.e. not just animations) released in that year.

In 1991, the studio accomplished two major targets proposed by Miyazaki: to double salaries and to recruit staff on a regular basis. These new policies carried undeniable advantages but also entailed a formidable increase in production costs, prompting the studio to plan conscientiously and strategically for improvement in box-office performance through a scrupulous focus on advertising. It was with Takahata's *Only Yesterday* that this new policy was for the first time seriously implemented to noticeable effect ("History of Ghibli" 3).

The following feature, *Porco Rosso*, was released in 1992 and rapidly became the Japanese box-office hit of the year, beating Spielberg's *Hook* and Disney's *Beauty and*

the Beast. While making *Porco Rosso*, Miyazaki started drawing the blueprint for a new studio, holding meetings with the builders and choosing all the materials himself. Ghibli moved to the new venue in Koganei in a suburb of Tokyo Met just after the debut of *Porco Rosso*. If Ghibli is quite unique as an animation studio, it is also exceptional as a physical space. In "Blue Sky's Trip to Japan," André Mazzone has enthusiastically described the building's principal characteristic as "a lovely feeling of openness," enhanced by the fact that "the amount of natural light everywhere is surprising" (Mazzone 1999).

The deliberately small car-park and prominent bicycle parking facilities succinctly convey Miyazaki's environmental outlook, as do the profusion of indoor greenery (for example, in the stairwell of the spiral staircase leading to the second floor and along the stairs themselves) and the presence of a garden roof— designed by the director's first son — where staff members are encouraged to take their breaks to save energy and where weeds are allowed to spread freely.

The building comprises the following areas and departments:

- basement: photography department;
- first floor: CGI, ink & paint and tracing departments and "bar" used as communication space for all staff;
- second floor: drawing and production departments (including Miyazaki's own desk);
- third floor: art department.

The decor is discreet and tasteful throughout, often consisting simply of framed cel drawings from Ghibli movies. The building's ubiquitous luminosity, largely facilitated by the extensive use of glass and unobtrusive white frames, is retained even in spaces which are not directly exposed to the outside — for example, the portion of the CG room on the first floor that lacks an actual window boasts a gloriously *painted* one, with a yellow field and racing clouds worthy of a sequence from *Totoro*. (A "Tour of Studio Ghibli," illustrated by means of pictures taken from various magazines, such as *Animage* and *Comic Box*, is available at the following address: http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/ghibli/tour/)

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In 1993, Ghibli started its exploration of the relatively novel territory of CGI by purchasing two large computerized cameras. The 1994 film directed by Takahata, *Pom Poko* (another number-one hit in Japan), signalled Ghibli's first use of CGI — though only in three cuts. It was with the production of *Princess Mononoke* (1997) that the studio began to specialize in the art of CGI. Their first 100 percent digital feature was Takahata's *My Neighbors the Yamadas* (1999), a production containing 150,000 computer-generated equivalents of traditional cels. An Avid Media Composer 8000 system was introduced at Studio Ghibli in 1998 and, since then, all of its projects have been edited digitally. *Spirited Away* was the first fully digital animated film directed by Miyazaki. The project made use of numerous computer graphics and animation tools, including

those patented by Softimage Co., a subsidiary of Avid. The use of digital techniques in specific productions is examined in depth in the course of the Case Study sections of this book, with an emphasis on the incremental integration of traditional and pioneering tools and methodologies.

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In 1996, the Walt Disney Corporation and Tokuma Publishing arrived at an agreement — known as the Disney/Tokuma Deal — whereby Disney was granted the worldwide (including Japan, but excluding the rest of Asia) home-video distribution rights to several Studio Ghibli films. Thus far, these have included Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Porco Rosso*, *Princess Mononoke*, *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle*, as well as Takahata's *Only Yesterday*, *Pom Poko* and *My Neighbors the Yamadas*, Yoshifumi Kondou's *Whisper of the Heart* and Hiroyuki Morita's *The Cat Returns*. The contract stipulates that "Disney cannot cut even one second from the films." According to Suzuki, "other companies such as Fox and Time-Warner contacted Tokuma, but Disney was the only company willing to agree to this condition, and that was the main reason why Tokuma chose Disney as a partner."

When some critics wondered whether the deal meant that, despite his misgivings about Disney productions, Miyazaki might actually have sold his soul to Disney, the Japanese director stated that "he didn't like the movies by Toho or Toei either (they are the Japanese movie companies which have been distributing the Ghibli films). He distinguishes between film production and film distribution. He also stated that he had agreed to the deal mainly to help Tokuma, which had backed him when he was starting out. He said he has earned enough money to last him a lifetime" ("The Disney/Tokuma Deal"). Furthermore, as Andrew Pollack stressed at the time of its establishment, the "agreement [would] give much greater exposure to the works of Miyazaki" who was still "little known outside his home country" at the time (Pollack 1996).

The agreement between Tokuma and Disney has developed over time to include items not covered by the original contract, primarily DVD rights. Although at present Disney has only video and movie distribution rights, not merchandising rights, it is anticipated that in the future Disney and Ghibli will also forge financial partnerships in the areas of magazines, CDs, and videogame software.

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In October 2001, "Miyazakiland" expanded further with the inauguration of the Ghibli Museum in the Mitaka Inokashira Park, outside Tokyo — a synthesis of a brightly painted fairy castle, a Gothic Revival extravaganza and an Antonio Gaudí flight of architectural fancy. Miyazaki himself designed the museum with the same care with which he would plan a movie, storyboarding — as it were — each aspect of its intended layout. A diminutive spiral staircase, a profusion of causeways and galleries with intricate wrought-iron railings, doors of disparate shapes and sizes, stained-glass windows adorned with Ghibli characters, numerous strobe lights and ceiling fans reminiscent of aeroplane propellers are among some of its most striking elements.

The museum enables visitors to literally step into Studio Ghibli's simultaneously enchanting and tantalizing worlds. At the same time, it documents the history of animation and its filming procedures. Indeed, several exhibits situated in the main gallery on the first floor make direct reference to developments in the history of animation technology:

- the replica of the extraterrestrial robot from *Laputa* is equipped with a large version of the Zoetrope (or "Wheel of Life");
- a spinning circle redolent of the Phenakistoscope displays an animation in which each of twenty jesters passes its head onto the next;
- the *Totoro*-inspired spinning contraption is undoubtedly the most impressive of the exhibits in this section of the museum: a series of models representing Satsuki, Mei, Totoros of various sizes and other secondary characters are placed in concentric circles on a fast-moving round platform around a central pole, to which is also attached, above the level of the platform, a concentric circle of models of the Catbus; appropriately timed strobe lights hit the models so as to produce the illusion of animation even though the figures are actually stationary.

The second floor features the mockup of an animator's studio illustrating the various phases of the animation process from storyboarding to completion through a plethora of drawings, watercolor sketches, cels and even wallpaintings — such as that of a window offering the view of a family of pigs at dinner. Not surprisingly, given Miyazaki's predilection for these animals, pigs actually feature prominently throughout the museum, inhabiting objects as diverse as menu displays and weathervanes. The third floor includes the greatest treat for young visitors: a replica of the Catbus in all its furry glory over which children are free to climb and frolic to their hearts' content. Like Studio Ghibli, the museum, too, has a garden roof— in this case, spectacularly dominated by a gigantic version of the *Laputa* automaton sprouting bits of vegetation from portions of its casting (Miyazaki's policy regarding weeds must be the same in Mitaka as it is in Koganei).

The museum also shows original short films that cannot usually be seen anywhere else in a theatre that echoes Baby's room in *Spirited Away*, specifically the sun and moon that obscure each other in turn depending on the locale's lighting conditions. The most memorable short films exhibited to date include:

- *Mei and the Kittenbus*, where the character of Mei from *Totoro* and the child of the original Catbus enjoy a nocturnal adventure in a forest teeming with spirits of all sorts;
- *The Whale Hunt*: here a group of schoolchildren's imaginary sea journey turns into reality and they find themselves cast off in a distant ocean;
- *Koro's Big Day Out*, the playful record of the adventures of a puppy wandering the streets of a town modelled on Koganei.[2]

The Ghibli Museum provides no formal routes and actively encourages its visitors to relish its space from the heart. Its slogan, appropriately, is *Let's Lose Our Way, Together*—

a motto which could feasibly apply to Miyazaki's entire opus. (Information regarding the Ghibli Museum and image galleries is available at: www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/museum/; www.ghibli-museum.jp/(in Japanese); www.tatutoz.com/ghiblimuseum/)

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Finally, it must be emphasized that the spellbinding dimension of Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli output owes much to Joe Hisaishi, the composer of the soundtracks for *Nausicaä*, *Laputa*, *Totoro*, *Kiki*, *Porco*, *Mononoke*, *Spirited Away* and *Howl*. Various other musicians have contributed significantly to the overall quality of Studio Ghibli's productions — most notably Michio Mamiya, the composer of the haunting score for Takahata's *Grave of the Fireflies*, and Yuji Nomi, who wrote the music for Kondou's *Whisper of the Heart* and for Morita's *The Cat Returns*. Nevertheless, Miyazaki's own films are somewhat inseparable from Hisaishi's style — or, rather, *styles*. Indeed, as Andrew Osmond has observed, "In Joe Hisaishi's two-decade composing career, he's produced orchestral music, electronic music, exercises in minimalism and avant-garde, a prodigious amount of piano work and plenty of rock and pop" (with both Japanese and English lyrics) (Osmond 2000).

Moreover, in 1999 Hisaishi re-scored the music for the English version of *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (released under the title of *Castle in the Sky* only in the U.S. for reasons that will be patently obvious to speakers of Spanish). In an interview in *Keyboard Magazine*, Hisaishi commented on this experience as follows: "According to Disney's staff, foreigners (non-Japanese) feel uncomfortable if there is no music for more than 3 minutes (*laughs*) ... it is the natural state for a (non-Japanese) animated film to have music all the time. However in the original *Laputa*, there is only one-hour worth of music in the 2 hour 4 minute movie. There are parts that do not have any music for 7 to 8 minutes. So, we decided to redo the music as the existing soundtrack will not be suitable for markets outside of Japan."

In the same interview, Hisaishi has also commented on a crucial difference between Western and Japanese approaches to the coordination of melodic and orchestral effects to character types and behavior which is here worth quoting in full insofar as it can help us grasp broader differences between those two expressions of the art and medium of animation, and lessons they may glean from each other: "The American way of putting music in a movie is basically very simple. They just match the music with the characters. For example, when the army shows up on screen, you hear the army's theme.... Until this time, I avoided such an approach, as I felt that it would make music dull.... But when I redid the music of *Laputa* this way, I learned a lot" (Hisaishi 1999).

As Osmond has noted, the most distinctive and recurrent elements of Hisaishi's art are a "sense of gentle innocence, especially in films like *Laputa*, *Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service*." Specific examples of scenes in which the soundtrack contributes vitally to the evocation of this atmosphere are the one in which Sheeta and Pazu "share a meal underground" in the Japanese version of *Laputa*, the one in which "the sisters race through the house in *Totoro*" and *Kiki*'s opening hilltop scene. "The second element of Hisaishi's *animé* music," according to Osmond, "is its sense of the magical, the holy." Illustrations of this feature include:

Mononoke's startlingly beautiful "Encounter" theme as Ashitaka first sees the feral, trans-human San; then there's the evocative "New Age" chimes as Porco Rosso encounters a ghostly fleet of planes. Child visions of the holy are suggested by the burst of music announcing the angelic Sheeta's "landing" in *Laputa* [Japanese version] and the introduction to the bus-stop scene in *Totoro*, when the awesome woods and darkened shrine are seen through the eyes of a nervous child.... The "holy" tag also applies, in different ways, to the poignant melody as Kiki sees the drawing Ursula has made of her — a more central moment than it sounds — and to the child's song when Nausicaä communes with the Ohmu [Osmond 2000].

4

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind

It was thanks to *Cagliostro*'s success and in recognition of its innovative quality that the magazine *Animage* approached Miyazaki in the early 1980s eliciting contributions to their publication. The director proposed numerous ideas for possible movies, but none of these materialized at the time, and he was asked instead to create a comic strip. This led to the goliath *manga* version of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, which Miyazaki started drawing and writing in 1982 and on which he would continue working periodically for over a decade. The *manga* is a cornucopian and challenging work the merit of which must be assessed independently of the movie. This proposition is corroborated, as Andrew Osmond has stressed, by the fact that over the years the *manga* succeeded in gaining "its own mythic status, both as a stupendous feat of world-building and a mushrooming epic ... it was not just the scale setting *Nausicaä* apart. (*Nausicaä*'s thousand-page length is not uncommon: Katsuhiro Otomo's *manga Akira* was more than twice as long). Rather ... it was that the strip could truly be described as a graphic novel, combining a disciplined plot with a conceptual unity belying its serial origins" (Osmond 1998). Like other Japanese science fiction sagas of herculean proportions, the *manga* version of *Nausicaä* is an elaborate ensemble of intermingling stories, and it is for this very reason that its overall narrative coherence leaves the reader both surprised and overwhelmed. It should also be noted that the *manga* logically provided greater scope for character and plot development, and that its translation into two hours' worth of screentime accordingly entailed the use of telescoping strategies and the amalgamation of elaborate sets of disparate events into single occurrences.

The *manga*'s transposition into a feature-length film took off at the end of 1983, capitalizing on the warm reception by the general public of the initial installments of the comic book and on the personal encouragement of the president of Tokuma, the publishing house behind *Animage*. Insofar as the Tokuma group did not own independent studios, Topcraft was selected to undertake the animation since this firm, despite its relatively minor standing, appeared to hold the artistic credentials most likely to do justice to *Nausicaä*'s sophisticated pictorial atmosphere.

In the production of both the *manga* and the film, Miyazaki drew on multiple sources of inspiration. Among these, special prominence must be accorded to the Japanese

folktale *The Princess Who Loved Insects*, the story of a highly unconventional incarnation of royalty in the guise of a medieval princess who was deeply attracted to all living things and shunned ritual and pomp. Science fiction and fantasy have obviously had a major part to play, specifically through the works of William Golding, Ursula Le Guin, Brian Aldiss, Isaac Asimov, J.R.R. Tolkien and Homer. The post-apocalyptic terror envisioned by texts such as Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) is concurrently palpable, while visual analogies clearly obtain between the Ohmu and Herbert's own imaginary monsters. The *Odyssey*'s own Nausicaä, namely the Phaeacian princess renowned for her love of nature and music, her fervid imagination and disregard for material possessions, is undoubtedly the preeminent model behind Miyazaki's heroine. The figure of Nausicaä is also foreshadowed by female characters featuring in earlier Miyazaki productions, notably Lana in *Conan, Boy of the Future* and Clarisse in *Cagliostro*, and concurrently anticipates later portrayals such as Fio's in *Porco Rosso*.

However, the "one big event," in the director's own words, that sparked his imagination and fuelled his desire to create *Nausicaä* was the pollution with mercury of Minamata Bay, as a result of which the fish stocks — left untouched as they would evidently be inedible — adjusted to the uncongenial environment by learning how to absorb the poison and indefatigably continued to reproduce. The Minamata Bay fish are unquestionably the real-life correlatives for the immensely and ingeniously adaptable fictitious plants portrayed in Miyazaki's film. The director has commented further on the phenomenon of natural resilience by emphasizing its profound difference from human survival strategies:

> The Nature of Nausicaä's world has absorbed the poison man created and is adapting to it and getting on with the business of living.... The technology of the human world is clumsy by comparison, driven by expediency and availability rather than planning and innovation.... Although craft skills are valued [in Nausicaä's world], as is shown in the complex tapestry-inspired montage that is used for the opening credits, art styles and modes of expression are very similar across the movie's civilizations [Miyazaki 1987, p. 78].

Drawing 914,800 viewers to the theatres in its native Japan alone, and vaunting a heroine that was still being elected "Number One *Animé* Character" by *Animage* fans in 1991, *Nausicaä* constitutes an unprecedented accomplishment in the world of Japanese animation — and one to which any contemporary Miyazaki aficionado ought to remain grateful given that it is precisely on the strength of its performance that Studio Ghibli was founded.

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Scourged and polluted by a cataclysmic conflict known as the Seven Days of Fire, which is presumed to have taken place one thousand years ago, the world portrayed in this film yields a scenario of nearly absolute desolation. Poisonous gases, noxious fungus and the rotwood-infested Fukai jungle threaten to spread to engulf the whole planet. Although Princess Nausicaä's realm, the Shire-like Valley of the Wind,[1] is temporarily immune to the rampant contamination of the Earth's natural resources thanks to a

beneficial breeze blowing from the sea, there is little doubt that it is only a matter of time before this inviolate land, too, falls victim to the ubiquitous infection. As the Fukai moves unrelentingly onwards, even the princess's compatriots — including her father, King Jhil — are affected by the dissemination of its lethal spores: in particular, they age prematurely as their bodies gradually ossify.

The dominant form of life now consists of enormous insectile mutants, among whom the Ohmu reign supreme. Much of the action revolves around contrasting attitudes towards this species and their forbidding habitat among different human communities. The Tolmekians, led by the ruthless Queen Kushana, aim at exterminating the forest without realizing the folly of their intentions, dogmatically regarding the Ohmu as intractable foes, and are even prepared to revive the only one of the *kyoshinhei* — the fire-belching demons that sparked the Seven Days — that has retained marginal vitality to aid them in their purpose. Nausicaä herself, conversely, is staunchly opposed to any plans geared towards the attainment of a tyrannical control of the environment, seeking instead to achieve an ever deeper understanding of nature.

The uniqueness of Nausicaä's mentality is thrown into the relief by the film's insistent emphasis on the obsessive determination exhibited by several of the other human characters to dominate the environment rather than explore the possibility of peaceful alliances, as well as on their tendency to foment discord and vengefulness in the pursuit of their objectives. By invading the Valley of the Wind to obtain the support of Nausicaä's subjects in their mission to destroy the forest, the Tolmekians unsurprisingly earn their hostility and resentment. Concomitantly, they are hated by the people of Pejitei, from whom Kushana has stolen the extant demon and whose young princess she has kidnapped and caused to die. Seeking revenge, the Pejiteians lure the Ohmu towards the Valley using as a bait a harpooned infant of their species. Nausicaä's conduct stands out in this grim carousel of acrimony and frenzy in the climactic scene where, having begged the Pejiteians to release the baby Ohmu and having got shot for her efforts, she at least manages to persuade them to take her and the injured insect back to the Valley. She thus hopes to stem the swarming rampage of the incensed Ohmu, against which neither the Tolmekian army nor the as yet unfledged demon have any effect. Trampled by the giant insects' ruinous stampede and deemed dead, the heroine now achieves her apotheosis: placated by her selfless act, the Ohmu restore her and lift her body higher and higher on the radiant fronds of their golden tentacles in a splendid cascade of shimmering particles.

Nausicaä is both unflinching and inspiring in her determination to fathom the natural world and to endeavor to communicate even with its most threatening species.[2] These facets of the protagonist's personality are foregrounded in the opening sequence of the movie where, as Osmond notes, "we see Nausicaä — masked and hooded like a medieval spaceman — walking alone in the forest's depths. Her reaction is not fear but awe: awe at a deadly but beautiful landscape teeming with life. The first five minutes of the film are almost wordless as the viewer shares Nausicaä's contemplation of an alien Earth" (Osmond 1998). It is through these exploratory efforts and through painstaking scientific research, discreetly undertaken in a secluded laboratory of her own making,

that Nausicaä incrementally discovers that the jungle is not, after all, evil. In fact, its floor turns out to be anchored to the branches of a subterranean canopy of huge trees and with their help the forest is actually purifying the Earth's air and soil by absorbing their toxins. As Steven Felman has observed, "Nausicaä's ecosystem ... functions narratively on a variety of levels.... Man is oppressed by a Nature gone mad by his own madness, but he doesn't realize that this oppression is temporary" (Felman 1991). In fact, the more bellicose factions, such as the Tolmekians, appear not only unable to grasp the revocability of their predicament but actually hell-bent on making its afflictions permanent and unrepealable. Conversely, nature retains astounding beauty and potential for the dauntless princess, however foul, tenebrous or squalid it may appear to be — hence her willingness to face extreme dangers and even self-sacrifice to enable her people to become reconciled with the depleted environment.

It is for this very reason that nature rewards her efforts by means of the Ohmu themselves, by making the carapaced and multi-eyed creatures responsible for saving the princess and returning her to the people of the Valley. This is not because the creatures are innately amicable: Miyazaki is no more keen on simplistically idealizing the forces of nature in this film than he will be in *Princess Mononoke*. In fact, the mammoth insects have shown themselves capable of spectacular acts of violence by the time they come to Nausicaä's rescue. Rather, they are inclined to help her because she, for her part, has consistently avoided unmotivated provocations of the insectile race. As Miyazaki has pointed out, "Nausicaä is not a protagonist who defeats an opponent, but a protagonist who understands, or accepts. She is someone who lives in a different dimension (Miyazaki 1984)."

Like many of Miyazaki's human characters, the Ohmu are an ambiguous admixture of brutality and mercy, animosity and equanimity. Where humans are concerned, the film offers one of the most remarkable instances of Miyazaki's flair for creating multifaceted and patently non-stereotypical characters in the figure of Kushana: though portrayed as the villain of the piece, she is also attributed convincing motives and emotions that somewhat justify her inflexible pursuit of revenge. Regrettably, the only version in which the film was (legally) available to Western fans for a long time,— the English dub made by Roger Corman in 1985 (New World Video) and released with the title of *Warriors of the Wind*,— suppresses this aspect of the Tolmekian queen's personality due to the exclusion of the line of dialogue in which Kushana's actions become understandable, if not wholly justifiable: namely, the original line where, having already shown that one of her arms is actually an armored prosthesis, the real one having been claimed by an irate Ohmu, she goes on to state that only the man who becomes her husband will see things that are even worse, at which point spectators realize that both her legs are prosthetic, too. Kushana could, to some extent, be regarded as the most direct ancestor of *Mononoke*'s Lady Eboshi.

Nausicaä herself, with her seamless fusion of courage, charm, tenaciousness and compassion, evinces an eminently polychromatic personality. Anticipating virtually all the heroines created by Miyazaki to date, she epitomizes the traditional feminine ideal, which the Japanese language describes as *yasashii* ("meek," "sensitive," "warmhearted,"

"kind"), and the masculine model designated by the term *bushido* ("the way of the warrior"). This is thrown into relief by her ability to empathize with all natural forms and to perform any action, from the most mundane to the most heroic, without the slightest trace of malice or self-interest, while also exhibiting the determination and prowess of a resolute fighter. Nausicaä's distinctive strength is underscored by a deftly handled inversion of roles whereby her mentor Lord Yupa, an intimate friend of King Jhil devoted to the exploration of the planet's secrets, is ultimately unable to capture the environment's self-reparative powers despite his tenacity. His pupil, conversely, succeeds precisely where he has failed by *finding* the path as an engaged agent rather than merely *searching* it as a detached onlooker. It is mainly through his characterization of this multifaceted female protagonist that Miyazaki has succeeded in constructing a tantalizing eco-allegory of veritably mythical proportions.

The female protagonists of subsequent Miyazaki productions will again combine contrasting attributes with various degrees of pathos depending on the overall atmosphere of the story in which they feature. In sunnier films, such as *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service*, what we witness is an admixture of infantile vulnerability and resourcefulness that ultimately yields generally auspicious prospects. Arguably the most overtly *yasashii* of Miyazaki's heroines, Sheeta (*Laputa: Castle in the Sky*) nonetheless exhibits considerable fortitude in her courageous confrontation of her captor, Muska, and in the active role she plays among Dola's pirates. Conversely, San (*Princess Mononoke*) would appear to be the least *yasashii* of Miyazaki's female characters, yet proves capable of behaving in a nurturing, loving and compassionate fashion not only towards the animals she has learned to respect and trust but also towards a human being. Chihiro (*Spirited Away*) is a more complex case, insofar as her relatively tender age in comparison with the characters mentioned thus far requires her — in the logic of the movie — not only to show a combination of contrasting values but actually to learn what such values may be and how to actively and knowingly embody them. Sophie (*Howl's Moving Castle*) is a more complex case still: having assented as a young woman to an essentially *yasashii* role dictated by familial and professional responsibilities, she suddenly discovers that her precipitous metamorphosis into an old woman provides her with an unexpected degree of assertiveness, willpower and perseverance in all sorts of circumstances and in the face of all sorts of potential and actual adversaries.

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The complexity of Nausicaä as a character and, by extension, of the entire film revolving around her exploits is amplified by the fact that the princess is perceived as both human and superhuman. This is intimated by her climactic visual connection with the legendary blue-robed savior mentioned in an early sequence of the movie. For this reason, some spectators have regarded *Nausicaä* as a fundamentally messianic narrative and found its deus-ex-machina conclusion, in particular, quite unsatisfactory. It could be argued that *Nausicaä*'s ending, though reparative, is not conclusively happy insofar as it does not promise any automatic redemption for the generations of humans and insects to come, and actually functions as an ironical enhancer of the pervasive sense

of darkness that dominates the main body of the story. Indeed, it is hardly deniable that even the joyous moments that emphasize the intense delight that the brave princess is capable of deriving from contact with all living things, albeit refreshing, ultimately serve to throw into relief the surrounding tides of violence, selfishness, vindictiveness and blind hatred. The sense that the finale does not deliver any definite guarantee of peace or harmony but hints instead at the trials that the future holds in store is conveyed more explicitly by the closing words of the *manga*, where the courageous embracing of the injunction to go on living is inextricably intertwined with a frank recognition of the arduousness of this task: "no matter how difficult it is, we must live"—an assertion which Michael Lane aptly describes as "words of passionate hope even against seeming reason" (Lane 2003a, p. 1).

The director himself, however, has expressed serious reservations about the effectiveness of *Nausicaä*'s ending and, specifically, about its use of a miraculous phenomenon so as to produce a happy resolution to the conflict between humankind and nature. It is for this reason that he devoted an additional decade to that issue in the production of the *manga* version of *Nausicaä*, which was not completed until 1994—and, as indicated above, only in a provisional fashion even then. However, Miyazaki did not truly get over his dissatisfaction until he made *Mononoke*, where the possibility of any conclusively felicitous closure is resolutely disputed.

Above all, Miyazaki is averse to the dissemination of ethical messages that are prone to jell into codified systems of belief due the tendency intrinsic in any such system to degenerate into dogmatism and zealous antagonism:

> Many things in a human mind which are said to be meaningful ... might actually exist in Nature.... We get confused because we get various worldly desires. But I'm afraid that I feel if we want to go beyond such desires and go somewhere pure, we might reach somewhere as an ordinary stone or water drops. *But in the moment we put these kinds of thoughts into words, everything becomes a disreputable religion* [Miyazaki 1994; italics added].

By contrast, Miyazaki is interested in exploring, in an eminently open-ended fashion, the ordinary activities and occurrences that characterize a living creature and elusively establish the rhythms of its existence, while honoring the ultimate mystery wherein these phenomena are shrouded:

> I couldn't help but to ask the question of what a life is, the question I knew from the beginning I couldn't answer. My dog is sixteen years old, and can die any day. He can hardly see. He can smell only a little, only one of his ears works a bit. But, he is still alive. When I see his face, he doesn't look that happy, but when I try to take him out for a walk, he looks a little bit happy. I wonder what a life is ... for example, I think he is no longer the dog he was. Ripples spread through [a] water surface, and as they spread, they gradually diminish. They are the same ripples, but they are not the same strong ripples [they were] right after they were born—maybe I can understand that way [Miyazaki 1994].

Although the relationship between humankind and nature is its pivotal concern, *Nausicaä* undeniably encompasses a wider range of preoccupations. Indeed, both the

film and its *manga* relation offer perceptive studies of diverse facets of humanity and humaneness by engaging with substantially diverse mentalities and personalities, and with both the qualities and the foibles of its central characters, judiciously avoiding any intimations of one-dimensionality or flip psychological generalizations. Above all, the film invites its viewers to ponder certain crucial questions concerning how people may live together, react to fear, to anger and to rancor, manage their emotions so as to operate discerningly, and raise other individuals' awareness by means of their own actions.

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Nausicaä was drawn in *threes* (i.e. only 8 frames out of the 24 frames of which every second of finished film consists were actually drawn) due to the limited budget available, which explains the occasional sense of choppiness conveyed by action sequences such as chases, some stilted character motion and a few overly stationary backgrounds. However, the film makes up for this potential flaw in more ways than one as I will illustrate.

Nausicaä exhaustively confirms the vital role played by storyboards as a means of enhancing a story through detailed preplanning. Most importantly, the storyboards employ varied shots by making some wide and others close. At the same time, they aim at building tension through images which suggest that something is going on in a portion of space which the audience cannot see at that particular point or, conversely, show the audience a source of danger or cause of impending surprise of which the pivotal character in the scene is not aware, thus emphasizing his/her vulnerability. *Close-ups* are used discriminately in order to draw the viewer into the action, whereas *establishing shots* help the viewer form an overall picture of who is where (and perhaps also why) in a given scene. *Cut-aways* are employed most effectively in *Nausicaä's* storyboards and in the animation itself: these are shots of small details, such as ornamental objects defining the style of a setting (e.g. the interiors of the Valley's buildings, and of the Pejiteian ship on which Nausicaä is taken prisoner), or of movement focusing on an individual part of the body (e.g. the protagonist's foot resolutely setting the *mehve*[3] in motion). These shots often succeed in conveying more visual information and emotional momentum than protracted stretches of dialogue ever do. Extreme close-ups are also particularly useful — especially in the handling of facial expressions — in conveying through a succinct and instantly recognizable pictorial code feelings of urgency, apprehension or solace.

Miyazaki's storyboards also emphasize PoV (point-of-view) shots, which show the audience what characters perceive from particular angles (both spatial and affective) and consistently motivate such shots by supplying some premonition of what it is — or might be — that is holding the characters' attention, drawing them into the action or repelling them from it. Often, several of the elements outlined above operate in mutually sustaining ways. For instance, the artist may present us with something that a character cannot immediately see and then use a PoV shot that shows how the character is reacting to what we have already been familiarized with. In such a case, the audience's and the character's perceptions are encouraged to follow parallel trajectories — which may

or may not, eventually, coalesce — instead of being forced together by a dominant authorial hand.

The documentary book entitled *The Art of Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind* (1984) — the first in Studio Ghibli's "Art of" book series — eloquently demonstrates that Miyazaki's success and reputation as an animation director have by no means diminished or diluted his commitment to painstaking draughtsmanship or passion for detailed character development by means of playful experimentation with shapes and styles leading to incrementally elaborate designs. A paradigmatic example is supplied by the symbolically crucial opening drawing of an awe-inspiring yet minimalistic great hall, in which an early version of Queen Kushana addresses crowds of Tolmekians clustered around a gigantic and largely dismembered robot that anticipates the Laputian automata. No less remarkable are the illustrations documenting the production of the aforementioned tapestry-montage featuring under the opening credits: a meticulously conceived artwork in its own right containing an astounding profusion of symbolic allusions to mythology, history and myriad religions, as well as to the recorded past and the prophesied future of *Kaze no Tani*. The stylized renditions of the life forms destroyed by the Seven Days and those of the surviving creatures are especially intriguing in their amalgamation of diverse stylistic influences. For example, the Fire Demon evinces Pre-Columbian features intermingled with elements of *matsuri* masks and of classic icons of the grotesque and the carnivalesque.

The image boards illustrating the development of the designs for the main characters — closely linked up with the *manga* drawings — bear witness to the experimental process conducive to the final product. Thus, Nausicaä is shown wearing a variety of outfits, ranging from a tasselled tunic and feathered headpiece redolent of Native American styles; a flowing gown suitable for a fairytale princess matched by a Pre-Raphaelite hairdo; numerous costumes with a more futuristic flavor approximating the one actually donned by the cinematic heroine. The character's age also fluctuates from one design to another: while in some images she appears to be little more than a child, in others she appears as a well-developed young woman. Varying degrees of assertiveness, vulnerability, maturity, curiosity, melancholia, confidence and sexiness are accordingly evoked by evolving incarnations of the Valley's princess. In some of the drawings, she is depicted with a faithful canine companion, while in others, parallel to the ideation of the *mehve*, her flying vehicle is a dragon.

Myriad vehicles, accessories, gadgets, protective masks and weapons, accompanied by highly detailed annotations specifying their attributes and functions, are also supplied. A privileged place is reserved for the protagonist's *mehve*, which is represented from multiple angles and in relation to Nausicaä's changing postures and movements. With the notable exception of Kushana's artfully molded prosthesis, the Tolmekians' technological artifacts are conspicuously ugly and blatantly destructive. Miyazaki's graphic studies foreground these features by juxtaposing designs of Kushana's airships and weapons with the more attractive and palpably peaceful technology of the Valley of the Wind. However, in accordance with his deep-seated belief in the fallibility of *all* human technology, Miyazaki concurrently highlights the rudimentary clumsiness of

the Valley's numerous windmills. The image boards itemize scrupulously the workings of individual parts of the machinery, vividly conveying the impression that keeping those apparatuses operational requires colossal efforts, and elliptically alluding to their puniness — regardless of their towering presence when viewed in isolation — in the context of the ominous and barren mountains that encircle *Kaze no Tani*.

Nausicaä was the first Miyazaki film to which Joe Hisaishi contributed his talent as a composer, the result of his efforts being quite a unique soundtrack that brings together in an unprecedented fashion Eastern and Western vocal and instrumental traditions. The soundtrack, moreover, was deftly harmonized with other sound effects, with the result that the overall acoustic ensemble contributes crucially to the animation-specific qualities of the movie. At the same time, aural effects were matched and contrasted consistently with dynamic and chromatic elements of the action: both the music and related sounds, for example, were designed to throw into relief the mysterious lure of the ubiquitous spores shed by the jungle plants in the form of shimmering snowfalls, of the toxic jungle's subterranean streams and of the petrified forms scattered over the wasteland. In the concept art for the film, incidentally, the spores are afforded a central place as the visual and tactile qualities of these ostensibly lethal growths are vividly and exactingly explored. Thus, they are alternately reminiscent of materials as varied as cotton wool, candy floss, down, icing sugar, cobwebs and marine micro-organisms, evoking varying levels of attractiveness or menace depending on the way the light plays upon them, rendering them unexpectedly opaque, translucent or transparent.

Oppositions and juxtapositions play an important role, as attested to by the opening transition from shots of the symbolic tapestry and its woven skies presented during the opening credits to a view of the "real" sky with its typically Miyazakian banks of vibrantly animated clouds. A further illustration is provided further on by the dance-like visual conversation taking place between the protagonist's gliding vehicle and its shadow on the ground below, as the two part, achieve varying degrees of distance from each other and eventually meet again as the *mehve* lands.

The animation is also characterized by a keen sensitivity to the importance of combining specific types of action and movement with appropriate chromatic palettes. Thus, the peaceful and reflective mood of the nocturnal scene in which Nausicaä sits by a window wondering what her future holds in store is matched by a suitably subdued, cool range of hues. By contrast, the violence of the action sequence that follows, culminating with the catastrophic crash of the Tolmekian airship, is accompanied by aggressively hot, bright colors. Interestingly, however, the contrast between the two types of action and corresponding moods is set up gradually by means of gentle color and light modulations, shots of the majestic shape of the cargo ship and the cool glimmer of its myriad lights supplying a subtle moment of transition.

Animals play a vital part and eloquently attest to Miyazaki's keenness on achieving a seamless fusion of realism and fantasy. As Richard Williams has emphasized, the effective rendition of animal movement in an animated film requires great dedication and extensive consultation of live-action points of reference showing the "actions of various animals" and, most importantly, "where the weight is" (Williams 2001, p. 328).

Miyazaki's sensitive understanding of animal movement is borne out by his ability to render the motions of both totally imaginary species (such as Lord Yupa's bird-like steed, the Ohmu and countless other bugs) and real or quasi-real beings (such as the eminently non-fluffy, non-Disneyesque fox squirrel Teto) in equally convincing and credible ways.

Teto's body language is especially noteworthy, particularly in the sequence dramatizing his first encounter with the heroine. Understanding that the creature is justifiably frightened, having been first captured by a gigantic gadfly and then chased by an enraged Ohmu upon his rescue by Yupa (who had mistaken the fox squirrel for a human child), the princess does not recoil as Teto digs his diminutive but razor sharp fangs into her finger but keeps reassuring him that there is "nothing to fear." The little beast's entire body language accordingly alters and, as tension gives way to a relaxed mien, the initially erect ears endearingly flop while he proceeds to lick affectionately the wound he has inflicted. The Ohmu are depicted with loving meticulousness. Bulky and menacing, they are nonetheless represented as highly refined organisms endowed with intelligence, sensitivity and purpose. The visual and animation effects associated with their eyes — the color of which alters dramatically depending on their moods and dispositions — are especially memorable.

Miyazaki applied the principle underlying his conception and rendition of animal movement to the representation of the natural environment in its entirety, basing his apparently imaginary botany upon scrupulous scientific documentation, in his determination to show that the story is not set in some remote galaxy but on Earth, and that it is in real spaces — however ingeniously redesigned and reinterpreted these may be — that the fate of our planet unfolds and is sealed.

The film posed major technical challenges which could not, of course, be addressed as one would nowadays by recourse to CGI and hence required the elaboration of context-specific manual techniques and tools. The representation of the Ohmu's motion, for instance, led to the deployment of a freshly invented technique, which could be described as a form of pre-digital layering, whereby the creatures were animated by recourse to overlapping cardboard strata for different portions of their anatomies.

A striking example of the degree of sophistication achieved by Miyazaki and his team in the animation of the film is supplied by the sequences revolving around the resurrection of the Fire Demon and its sensational disintegration. These sequences are endowed with a dramatic intensity that enables them to transcend the level of merely grotesque spectacle — this is especially noticeable if one compares the Demon's morphing with analogous scenes in Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* (1988), where the overall visual atmosphere verges on the farcical.

As in much *animé*, so in Miyazaki's *Nausicaä*, eyes play a crucial role, fully corroborating Williams's proposition that eyes are the portion of a character's face that deserves most fastidious dedication insofar as the "eyes are what people watch" equating them to the "visible part of the brain" and indeed to a person's very soul (Williams 2001, p. 325)

The pupil holds pride of place in eye animation within the domain of *animé* gen-

erally (and Miyazaki's works are no exception), feelings being often conveyed precisely by the play of light on the pupil, rendered in the guise of white circles of varying diameters, and through its total dilation at times of heightened emotion. Illustrative examples of situations in which eyes play an especially prominent role in *Nausicaä* are the shots showing the protagonist's reaction to the sight of her murdered father, her apprehensive expression as Yupa surprises her in her secluded laboratory, her horrified realization that Princess Lastelle cannot possibly survive her injuries, and her outrage at the scene grimly flaunting the harpooned baby Ohmu.

An effective use of facial expressions does not necessarily require emphatic use of eye movement. For example, one of the most effective moments in the entire movie, where facial animation is concerned, is the brief scene in which Princess Lastelle of Pejitei, mortally wounded by the crash of the Tolmekian transport by which she had been abducted, obtains reassurance from the protagonist that every single item aboard the ship has been destroyed, gently closes the eyes through which alone she has managed to express any sensations in her final moments and, relieved, passes away. Also memorable, in this respect, is the scene in which Prince Asbel, resolute to the point of stubborness in his determination to avenge his unfortunate sister, is about to attack the plane carrying Nausicaä to Kushana's realm as a hostage, and is stopped abruptly by a hallucinatory glimpse of Lastelle's face in the heroine's own countenance. A further instance here worthy of notice is the scene in which Grandmother defiantly confronts Kushana, her outrage being conveyed most potently, paradoxical as this may sound, by the expression flashing in her blank, completely blind eyes.

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As Miyazaki states in an interview addressing the ever-pressing question of the relationship between nature and human technology, a Socratic acceptance of the ultimate elusiveness of knowledge should be posited as the prerequisite for any honest and respectful involvement in ecological debates:

> It's not like we can coexist with Nature as long as we live humbly, and we destroy it because we become greedy. When we recognize that even living humbly destroys Nature, we don't know what to do. And I think that unless we *put ourselves in the place where we don't know what to do and start from there*, we cannot think about environmental issues [Miyazaki 1997a].

If we assume that we know — or, at any rate, that we are capable of acquiring knowledge and of using it to control matters relating to natural depletion — we are most likely to deliver scarcely more effective a tool than some abstract ideological manifesto. This would not genuinely address the *messiness* of things — the way, as Lane puts it in his commentary on the *manga* version of *Nausicaä*, life always "overflows and squanders itself," only occasionally and arbitrarily choosing "to be fruitful" (Lane 2003a, p. 8). To be truly human amounts to tolerating the ineluctability of non-knowledge, painful as this may be, for ultimately it is "the capacity of a life to suffer that makes it transcend man's attempt to predict it, to control it" (Lane 2003a, p. 4).

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Laputa: Castle in the Sky

Heartened by the sensationally warm reception met by *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* the world over, Hayao Miyazaki, Isao Takahata, and Tokuma Shoten Publishing decided to found Studio Ghibli in 1985. *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, the new studio's first feature film, employed almost exactly the same production crew that had been engaged on *Nausicaä*, with Miyazaki himself taking personal responsibility for the design of virtually every single aspect of the movie's multifarious settings — some of which were inspired by Greek architecture and European urbanistic templates, while others were based on real locations and accordingly underpinned by scrupulous fieldwork — and astounding variety of flying machines, as well as for the delivery of character sketches and storyboards. Even though it did not match *Nausicaä*'s scintillating performance in theatres around the world (Miyazaki's last pre-Ghibli production had globally attracted one million spectators), *Laputa* was by no mean a disappointment, drawing around 800,000 viewers in Japan alone and rapidly ascending to the status of highest grossing animation film of the year in Japan.

(Note that the word "Laputa" was omitted from the title upon the film's U.S. video release in 1999 due to its potentially obscene connotations and the offense these might have caused to the Spanish-speaking segment of the American population.)

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In *Laputa*, Sheeta and Pazu take their lives in their hands and soar high above the clouds to find the remnants of an ancient civilization supposedly able to erect castles in the sky by recourse to dark, alien technologies that may soon enslave the Earth. Their aim is to purge this drifting world of its evil forces and enable it to regenerate itself. However, two stubborn opponents stand in their path: the megalomaniac secret agent Muska, who believes that Sheeta can lead him to Laputa and hence to opportunities for global domination, and the sky pirates led by Ma Dola — notably more principled and humane than the secret agent — who are after Laputa's legendary treasures. Through Sheeta's and Pazu's ordeals, the film dramatizes what could be termed a compendium of Miyazaki's recurring concerns: the young individual's journey of self-discovery in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles and in the conspicuous absence of parental guidance; the unresolved conflict between human technology and the natural

environment; the iniquitous pursuit of political and economic power; the interweaving of ancient traditions and futuristic forebodings; and the often baffling collusion of Eastern and Western values and styles.

As with the Ohmu in *Nausicaä*, so with the civilization of Laputa, we are not presented with a univocally and undilutedly malevolent power but rather with an ambivalent admixture of good and evil which, ominously, is more likely to steer towards evil as a result of human interference. The equivocal character of the floating island is foregrounded by drawing attention to the discrepancy between appearance and reality. As Helen McCarthy has observed, "The city of Laputa itself first looks like the ideal combination of science and nature ... a series of tranquil gardens unfolding around a hidden core of crystalline power. Only as the film progresses do we see that the city shows only its harsh and threatening underside to the world below, reserving the tranquillity and beauty above for its own elite" (McCarthy 1999, p. 98).

The floating island evinces exceptional architectural complexity, bearing full witness to Miyazaki's distinctive approach to the articulation of space. The gradual development of the director's initial design for Laputa is exhaustively documented by numerous sketches and concept drawings, as well as by the prodigiously detailed storyboards. Simultaneously redolent of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting *The Tower of Babel* (1563), of the setting of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), and of Alan Lee's paintings of Minas Tirith for *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955), Miyazaki's Laputa comprises three layers of ramparts of decreasing diameters, a crowning citadel eventually crested by a gigantic tree top, and an inverted dome at the bottom wherein Laputa's dark secrets are preserved. The lower portion of the island is shown to eventually collapse, leaving a citadel surrounded by grassy spaces with a single layer of fortification and the roots of the huge tree cascading from its base.

Pre-digital layering played a vital role in the depiction of images of Laputa wrapped in ostensibly impenetrable stacks and dense swirls of clouds. The animators would normally composite the final image from a background layer representing the sky's expanse, a middle layer capturing the island itself, and a foreground layer featuring fleeting, multicolored clouds, physically closer to the human characters approaching Laputa at any given point. This was an inevitably laborious method which recent developments in digital technology have rendered relatively straightforward. However, the pre-digital procedure used for *Laputa* is a valuable testimony to Studio Ghibli's inveterate commitment to painstaking engagement in all the stages of the animation process regardless of the intellectual and physical rigors that some of these may pose.

In representing the ambivalent nature of technology, Miyazaki drew inspiration from a considerable range of historical, fictional and pictorial sources ranging from Leonardo Da Vinci to Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. The main source of inspiration behind *Laputa* has unequivocally been designated by the director himself as the "island floating in the sky in the third section of *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift (Miyazaki 1997a)." (By some weird coincidence for which neither Swift nor Miyazaki can be either blamed or lauded, it so happens that the eighteenth-century writer's protagonist ended up in Japan.)

The enduring legacy of magical stones in various traditions should also be taken into account when looking at Miyazaki's sources of inspiration. Such stones have from

time immemorial been regarded as instruments supplied directly by nature in order to help us live in accordance with the presumed harmony of the spheres by catalyzing and channeling energy in a salubrious fashion. Although this notion, recently revamped by the vogue for crystal therapy, may look like a somewhat tawdry concession to New Age beliefs on Miyazaki's part, it should be noted that it actually has its roots in the most ancient religions and mythologies. Indeed, crystal therapy has represented an integral component of Hindu culture for many centuries, was practiced in ancient Egypt and, some argue, was central to the cultural heritage of the mythical Atlantis. Shamans all over the world still regard rock crystal as an enlightening stone capable of cleansing, energizing and protecting the soul, thus stimulating self-consciousness and facilitating the retrieval of submerged memories. In Sheeta's case, the magical crystal would appear to be endowed with such shamanistic powers, insofar as it undoubtedly plays a key role in the character's gradual emergence from her initial state of ignorance, passivity and relative immaturity, and attendant development of self-knowledge and a clear sense of purpose. At the same time, the stone encapsulates the principle of cosmic harmony by symbolizing the collusion of body and soul, nature and nurture: the song related by the heroine to the skeptical Muska succinctly communicates this idea in emphasizing that human beings have roots in the Earth, and that their life rhythms are inextricable from those of the wind, of seeds and of birds.

Miyazaki concurrently celebrates and challenges this utopian outlook by projecting it onto a past whose visions have already been exploded by the actual course of history. To convey his ambivalent stance in specifically visual terms, the director again draws on diverse cultural sources. For instance, the portentous light marking the end of Laputa brings to mind the biblical fire hurled upon Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as the forks of lightning summoned by Indra (the Hindu god of the Sky analogous to the Greek Zeus), and the heavenly arrows of the *Ramayana*, the 4th century B.C. Hindu epic recounting the abduction and rescue of the wife of Rama (one of Vishnu's avatars), namely Sita (the affinity between this name and "Sheeta" is, incidentally, noteworthy). The sense of ambivalence is fully captured by the finale, where it is stressed that magic may work in favor of a regenerative mission only by integrating an inevitable dose of violence and destructiveness. The spell recited in unison by Sheeta and Pazu releases the island's crystal core and allows the energy held therein to destroy its underground machinery — a supercomputer of unfathomable complexity in control of a lethal weapons system. Finally, this crumbles and its pieces crash to Earth alongside Laputa's battle automata, while the freed remnants of the floating city soar far beyond the reach of human covetousness and depravity. When the young protagonists realize that in order to stop Muska from using Laputa's hidden power in order to subjugate the Earth they have no choice but to invoke the formidable words taught by Sheeta's grandmother, the narrative acquires a heroic dimension unusual for Western animation, since the logical prospect which this entails is the loss of their own lives in the process.

If this episode emphasizes the inextricability of regeneration from destruction, an analogously equivocal mood can be observed in the closing frames, where the protagonists fly towards an unknown future, bathed in the light and colors of a stupendous

sunset and borne along on the wings of hope into spaces too fragmentary yet to be called either dreams or nightmares. The ending, moreover, contains a further element of ambiguity: while the floating island rises, re-appropriated by nature, through the sky's infinity, a gardening robot can be seen, tending to Laputa's ancient vegetation — a symbol of harmony and peace but also, simultaneously, a reminder of the ineluctable endurance of technology.

While it is important to acknowledge Miyazaki's literary and mythological sources, it is also notable that no less vital an influence upon *Laputa* was the director's trip to Wales in 1985, which he made specifically in order to research everyday life in mining communities in preparation for the making of *Laputa*: "I was in Wales just after the miners' strike.... I saw so many places with abandoned machinery, abandoned mines — the fabric of the industry was there, but no people. It made a strong impression on me" (quoted in McCarthy 1999, p. 95). Pazu's home town, Slagg's Ravine, is indeed a diminutive mining village relying on its aging machinery for hand-to-mouth survival. Extensive vaults and tunnels, inhabited solely by the amiable hermit Old Pom and by beguiling lights that come most vibrantly to life when Laputa is floating just above them, hark back to the deserted locations witnessed by Miyazaki in Wales. The watercolor sketches of the mining town reproduced in the book *The Art of Laputa* (1986) are especially effective in conveying a pervasive atmosphere of melancholy desolation, largely due to their employment of a minimalistic palette composed entirely of shades of blue and grey.

The early chapters in the long history of the evolution of humankind's abiding fantasies about flight and flying machines are alluded to in the images presented under the opening credits: a succession of sublimely preposterous apparatuses designed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the documentary validity of which is conveyed by chromatic schemes and graphic techniques redolent of old prints. This stab at verisimilitude is profoundly ironical, given that the images do not represent real machines but rather depict what the visionaries of those centuries were inclined to imagine. However, the subdued color schemes and fine shapes also help the images come across as ingeniously quaint rather than bluntly ludicrous.

As David Chute has observed in his assessment of the film, "There's a hobbyist glee in a lot of this stuff: the sheer fun of building clever mockups from leftover bits and pieces" (Chute 1998). The procedure described by Chute is redolent of the haphazard technique through which the San Francisco Bridge described by William Gibson in *Virtual Light* comes into being: an "amorphous" yet "startlingly organic" architectural "carnival," the Bridge "had just *grown* ... one thing patched onto the next, until the whole span was wrapped in this formless mass of *stuff*, and no two pieces of it matched" (Gibson 1994, pp. 58–59; 163). A comparable impression — albeit colossally amplified — of unplanned fractal accretion is evoked by the wizard's clattering and bellowing architectural patchwork in *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004).

Miyazaki's imaginary archaeology evokes the dreams and ambitions of the Industrial Revolution, whereas the actual fate of Pazu's town drastically debunks them by tangentially quizzing the validity of the Hegelian faith in ongoing advancement towards

higher and higher ends. Moreover, the sequence conjures up a sense of nostalgia while concurrently defamiliarizing it. Indeed, it does not constitute a genuinely nostalgic contemplation of an era or a technology that ever existed but rather a tongue-in-cheek homage to a musing that blatantly failed to come to fruition. Miyazaki is evidently not concerned with how the future figured forth by preindustrial cultures may have become a reality in fully fledged industrial dispensations but rather with those cultures' quirkily hypothetical self-projections onto a fundamentally unspecified future. The antiquarian take on science fiction adopted in *Howl* strikes analogous chords in both stylistic and ideological terms.

It should be noted that the floating islands that also appear, alongside the machines in the opening segment anticipate the celestial bodies created by the artist Naohisa Inoue for the fantasy sequences of Yoshifumi Kondou's *Whisper of the Heart* (1995), which the painter indeed refers to as "laputas" in acknowledgment of their Miyazakian roots, as well as elements of the visual style to be found in *Whisper*'s unofficial sequel, Hiroyuki Morita's *The Cat Returns* (2002). Inoue's art and *Laputa*'s accretional architecture indubitably share an appetite for protean and prismatic geographies.

Other visual influences underlying specifically the conception of the movie's most intricate locations — e.g. the railway lines around the mining village, the fortress in which Sheeta and Pazu are kept by the infamous Muska, and Laputa's technological nucleus — range from the imaginary prisons depicted by Giambattista Piranesi (1720–1798), through the magnificently absurd spatial configurations immortalized by M.C. Escher (1898–1972), to the visual style of the science-fiction movie *Forbidden Planet* (1956).

The most salient feature of Miyazaki's representation of space in *Laputa* arguably is his persistent emphasis on the contrasting attractions of height and depth, of ascending and plunging, and on the evocation of a quasi-specular relationship between the sky and the earth that is conducive to an essentially vertiginous conception of space. This is evident in the sequence showing Sheeta and Pazu fleeing the contingents of the pirates and of Muska's associates in and around the mining town, as well as in the sequence in which the protagonists tentatively look down into Laputa's lower gardens from a considerable height, inviting the audience to share their own sense of disorientation and awe. The mirror-like relationship between height and depth is consistently sustained through the juxtaposition of the lifestyle of the Earth-bound denizens of a community that ekes out a meager living by delving deep into increasingly unyielding tunnels and caves, and the lifestyle of people that appear to operate entirely in the air, from the pirate clan to the armed troops seeking to achieve control over Laputa. This juxtaposition never deteriorates into a simplistic binary opposition, however, for the Earth-bound settings also exhibit soaring qualities in virtue of their eminently perpendicular architectural clusters, whereas the aerial segments of the movie's society are ultimately weighed down by the secrets embedded in the floating island's nefarious past.

In the rendition of the impoverished Welsh community and its geographical situation, this approach to the aesthetics of space carries eminently ideological connotations, for it symbolically alludes to the destiny of a whole society and a whole tradition barely

teetering on the edge of the abyss. Technically, this approach to space gains much from the use of adventurous camera angles that depart from the customary tendency to make the camera's point of view level with the human eye and show an even horizon, and experiment instead with disorienting and mystifying perspectives. Concurrently, the movie consistently resorts to depth-of-field effects, namely shifts of focus between the foreground and background that serve to emphasize the features of different and often contrasting portions of a scene — e.g. the idyllic peacefulness of Pazu's rooftop and the intimidating magnificence of the surrounding ravines.

Baleful embodiments of technology at its most callous and exploitative can be found in the representations of the black dome beneath Laputa's enchanted gardens and majestic trees. The train that captures Sheeta and Pazu, and the iron dreadnought in which the protagonists are conveyed to Tegis fortress encapsulate a similarly ominous take on technology that radically undermines the gentle dreaminess of the apparatuses depicted under the opening credits. Conversely, Miyazaki's visuals foreground the beauty of individually hand-crafted machines: principally, Pazu's delicate glider and Ma Dola's charmingly eccentric ship. An element of self-reflexivity is entailed by this aesthetic choice, for the contrast evoked by the film between industrially and manually produced objects also echoes Miyazaki's ongoing emphasis on the importance of retaining a hand-drawn component in the production of animated features even as new technologies are embraced.

Miyazaki's methods of characterization, and especially his subtle modulation of positive and negative traits so prominent in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, can again be detected in the portrayal of *Laputa*'s young protagonists. Though plucky, resourceful and reciprocally strengthened by the power of love, both Sheeta and Pazu are also weakened by a lack of knowledge, which is only gradually and painfully amended as the narrative progresses. Sheeta remains unaware for long of her ancestry as the legitimate heir of the royal house of Laputa and does not, at first, even know how immensely powerful the levitation crystal[1] that she carries as an heirloom truly is. It is her relative ignorance that enables Muska to retain a modicum of power over her as he pursues the path to total and illegitimate power. Pazu, eager as he is to demonstrate that his father was unjustly ridiculed for professing the existence of Laputa, only has his inherent faith and courage on his side and no reliable data to go by except an old photograph (visually redolent of the images presented under the opening credits and hence, implicitly, questionable).

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As always in Miyazaki's films, seemingly insignificant details often carry greater pictorial and emotional impact than spectacular sequences, whether in the capture of ornamental elements, foliage, plumage or — prosaic as this may sound — kitchenware. Nothing, in Studio Ghibli's ethos, is too lowly a subject for the committed animator.[2] Some of the most lovingly detailed shots involve the evocation of air as a dynamic substance, rather than a transparent given, and as endowed with variable levels of density and vibrancy. A touching detail can be found in the scene where Pazu returns to work

after rescuing Sheeta and leaving her asleep on the platform from which he has caught her, part of him appearing to suspect that he has been hallucinating. The character does not explicitly voice this feeling, but the audience can extrapolate it from the mixed expression of wonder and delight that flashes across his face as he catches a glimpse of a tiny detail: Sheeta's feet, protruding over the platform high above, in the exact spot where he left her. Similarly effective are the shots of the delicately drawn flowers growing just outside the tunnel-like opening from which Pazu, a captive in the Tegis dungeon, catches a glimpse of his surroundings before falling once more into the deep cell's darkness.

One of *Laputa*'s most distinctive features, where the implementation of animation techniques is concerned, is its subtle handling of the *poetics of weight*. As Milt Kahl emphasized, it is vital for animators to "know where the weight is at any given moment on the character ... and where it's coming from and where it's just travelling over and where the weight is transferring to" (quoted in Williams 2001, p. 256). Vividly and succinctly conveying the sense of an object's — or person's — weight shows how the character responsible for picking up the object or person in question *prepares* for it. As Richard Williams puts it, relative impressions of ponderousness or daintiness can only be adequately evoked by the way characters "anticipate the weight" (Williams 2001, p. 256).

One of *Laputa*'s most memorable sequences exhibits what may happen when a character is not in a position to anticipate the weight of the body he is about to hold, for the simple reason that such a body appears to defy the law of gravity. In the sequence, Sheeta descends, unconscious, from somewhere high up in the nocturnal skies and lands in Pazu's arms. At first feather light due to the levitation crystal's power over her body, Sheeta suddenly resumes the weight of a normal girl, and Pazu must perform a veritable feat of balancing acrobatics to avoid certain death. This disorientingly mercurial shift in weight lends an unexpectedly hilarious flavor to a scene otherwise endowed with quasi-sublime intensity and an ethereal atmosphere of transcendence by both the chromatic palette and the graceful pace of the final stages of Sheeta's descent.

At the same time, the concurrently comical and tantalizing adjustments made by Pazu to make sure he and Sheeta do not fall into the chasm below illustrate that the effective manipulation of weight does not result merely from the fashion in which weight is approached but also from the techniques used in order to show how a character negotiates and controls it — or indeed fails to do so. For instance, in the course of a precipitous run such as the one undertaken by Sheeta and Pazu as they endeavor to escape the double threat of the military and the pirates, their bodies are propelled forward and their entire mass is seemingly channelled into securing that the motion can continue unhindered. Yet, in order to maintain a modicum of realism and — more importantly — go on being entertaining, any animated run must come to an end and must do so in a dramatically interesting way. Allowing the body to submit totally to the physical law of inertia and simply keep on running (even assuming this would ever be physiologically possible) would, quite frankly, be boring. The act of coming to a stop is a crucially important element of the overall process of weight manipulation in

animated films. "Frank Thomas says — 'we've got to do something to stop the forward progression of believable weight.' Whatever was in motion will try to keep on going — arms, head, hands, hair, drapery. So we stop in bits — each bit indicating the weight of itself" (Williams 2001, p. 264).

The aforementioned run accomplishes this objective with originality and flair. A later instance of swift forward motion — this time induced by anger and frustration on Pazu's part at being apparently rejected by Sheeta — illustrates the inverse process to the one just outlined by having the character awkwardly collapse rather than achieve control over his movements. This is an effective and visually concise way of conveying Pazu's pervasive feelings of hopelessness and dejection at this juncture in the narrative.

Another pivotal aspect of *Laputa*'s style of animation consists of its handling of facial flexibility. The film exhaustively demonstrates how important it is, in the frame-by-frame orchestration of a change of expression, to stagger the modifications instead of going from A to Z, as it were, in one single transition. Facial animation in Ghibli's first production exemplifies this tenet by concentrating on facial *sections* — eyes, nose, mouth, ears, hair — and creating frames with overlapping elements, ensuring that no stage of the change is excessively abrupt or out of synch with the overall pattern of motion. Applying the principle of segmented fragmentation, it is possible for the animator to have an action work its way down or up the face, as well as capitalize on ironic contrasts by having the two halves of the face appear to convey conflicting emotions. The effects achievable by this method are aesthetically more satisfying, as well as more believable, than any obtainable by having a character switch in the space of just two frames from a calm to an agitated state, say. At the same time, by accommodating the possibility of capturing antagonistic moods simultaneously, it allows for the expression of a graphically wider and psychologically more complex range of emotions.

Segmentation is also dexterously employed in *Laputa* in the dramatization of changes that engage not just the face but the entire body in order to limber up and add verve to a character's performance without, however, sacrificing the figure's overall solidity and stability. It is crucial, in this respect, to decide carefully where to place the passing positions between keyframes, for it is in these transitional places that a character's movement comes to life as individualized and unique, and it is here that suppleness is introduced without the character's gestural and physical consistency being compromised. This is attested to by the sequence in which the protagonists manage a narrow escape by means of Sheeta's pendant. They begin their descent clutched in each other's arms, then float simply holding hands and eventually touch the ground. What is important is that Sheeta's and Pazu's movements are not presented as a linear and simplistic progression from an embrace, through flotation, to landing. In fact, the characters are placed at the center of a highly varied and almost dancelike series of both individual and relational gestures and postures that emphasize their flexibility without destroying their coherence.

The sequence also derives its effectiveness from Miyazaki's handling of *pressure*. This term normally refers to the effort put into an action: the pressure applied to an object in touching, pushing or lifting it, for example, must seem commensurate with

the weight and substance of the object in question. In the sequence, this rule is suspended, as the qualities of the element upon which the characters' bodies yield pressure — air — are drastically redefined. Sheeta and Pazu appear to be immersed in the substance through which they drift and glide as though its density were more akin to that of water or an analogous fluid. (A comparable effect is conveyed by the climactic flight sequence in *Spirited Away*.)

A vital role is played by *accents* and *takes*. The term "accent" generally refers to the moment in a shot at which a character conveys an extreme emotion. This is not, ideally, a sudden and totally unexpected occurrence but is actually prepared for, and made part of a gradual — however brief — process. A "take," as Williams explains, "is an anticipation of an accent which then settles" (Williams 2001, p. 285). For instance, it is possible to display the transition of a character's whole body from a feeling of mild surprise, through an anticipation suggesting bewildered disbelief, to an accent showing utter shock and/or alarm, which may then settle once the character has had a chance to take the scene in. The settling position is often a stationary and relatively relaxed version of the attitude displayed in the anticipation, and indeed conveys in a composed fashion what the anticipation conveyed in dynamic form. Takes are a truly invaluable way of building up momentum, creating suspense and varying the rhythm of an action.

These processes are evident in the "fall-to-earth" sequence discussed above, as well as in the scene where Sheeta comes to fully recognize the powers inherent in the crystal. Let us consider each in turn. In the first instance, Pazu at first wonders at Sheeta's lightness; he then appears to sense a vague change but to be unsure as to its meaning (anticipation: stage one); next, he is absolutely certain that the girl in his arms is now as heavy as she should have been in the first place (anticipation: stage two) and his expression shifts to one of unequivocal panic (accent). In the second example, Sheeta's countenance is initially suggestive of budding surprise mixed with a sense of inquisitiveness and gradually develops, through bewilderment and disbelief, into full-fledged shock. Her body, accordingly, seems alternately drawn towards and repelled by the source of her emotions. A subtle use of takes and accents can also be observed in the rendition of Sheeta's changes of expression — from curiosity, through apprehension, to sheer pleasure — as she emerges onto Pazu's roof and first encounters his loyal pigeons.

The extent to which the manipulation of takes, anticipations and accents yields effective outcomes will depend largely on the animator's skill at delaying actions and intensifying their vitality by incorporating an apposite number of passing positions between extremes without, however, "overanimating" for the sake of it (Williams 2001, p. 292). Moreover, animators "shouldn't be afraid of distortion in the *interior* of an action. Our drawings or images may look strange, but we only really see the start and end positions. We *feel* the distortion within and that's what counts" (Williams 2001, p. 290).

Above all, *Laputa* incarnates Williams's pivotal lesson regarding the manipulation of time in animation as the key factor behind the essential quality of animation as an art form and as a medium — namely, its disengagement from the laws of physics — and, to some extent, of logic, too: "We have the art that can play most freely with time. We don't have to use normal time. We can either go too fast — to get spastic humour and

frantic activity — or go too slow and get beauty and dignity.... Combine it. Go for the change, the contrast' (Williams 2001, p. 297). Sheeta's "fall" is itself an exemplary instance of Miyazaki's subtle timing techniques and control of pace as the motion changes from a headlong dive to an elegantly somnambulistic descent. The juxtaposition of superdynamic action scenes and sequences and slow-paced, reflective moments assiduously reiterates the validity of Williams's proposition throughout *Laputa*. In the former category, we may place the pirates' cartoonishly colorful raids, the breakneck runs, the adrenaline-pumping fights and madcap chases, and the explosive climaxes taking place both in the air and on the ground. The latter category, for its part, includes lofty panoramas of drifting cloud banks and majestically gliding airships, aerial views of Pazu's town and of the floating island, and the awe-inspiring landscapes through which Pazu's pigeons dart, flutter and soar with the accompaniment of his (or rather Joe Hisaishi's) glorious music. Some of the most memorable sequences, moreover, are relatively short and silent, as paradigmatically borne out by the one in which Pazu's father is seen flying through a raging storm and briefly catching sight of the floating island, his enthusiasm aloft on the evanescent wings of a vivid but receding dream.

6

My Neighbor Totoro

Miyazaki's *My Neighbor Totoro* and Takahata's *Grave of the Fireflies* were released together as a double-feature entertainment ensemble in April 1988, following Studio Ghibli's realization that producing just one feature every couple of years was financially unwise insofar as even a single box-office flop would put them out of business altogether.[1] The simultaneous production of two films turned out to be a herculean task: as stated in the Pathea commentary on the production of *Totoro* and *Fireflies*, "the scene was not pretty. Artists were switched back and forth from the two different production teams." According to Studio Ghibli producer Toshio Suzuki, "The process of making these films at the same time in a single studio was sheer chaos. The studio's philosophy of not sacrificing quality was to be strictly maintained, so the task at hand seemed almost impossible. At the same time, nobody in the studio wanted to pass up the chance to make both of these films. Who knew when, or even if, such a chance would come again?'" ("*My Neighbor Totoro*: Production").

The tense atmosphere alluded to by Suzuki was exacerbated by the fact that Takahata, much as he wanted to do *Fireflies*, was hesitant due to the movie's disturbing themes — partly redolent of his own wartime experiences — and so tended, understandably, to procrastinate. Furthermore, the tight production schedule meant that there was not sufficient time for Takahata to experiment with novel animation styles in the ways he would have wished to, and he therefore had to adhere to relatively conventional approaches. Thankfully, Miyazaki urged him on, stressing that Takahata would most probably never be presented with the same opportunity again. *Fireflies* had not been completed as originally intended by the time the two films were theatrically released and did not acquire its definitive form until its subsequent edition as a home video.

Interestingly, Takahata eventually ended up feeling that *Fireflies* is a respectable accomplishment not just in the context of his personal career or indeed in the history of Studio Ghibli but in the domain of animation at large: "I believed this type of project had a place in the world of animation. I feel I had broadened the horizon of animated films, and in this sense, it's one of the most important works I've done" (Takahata 2004). (*Grave of the Fireflies* is discussed further in the next chapter.)

Takahata's film is dark and harrowing, while *Totoro* is a generally charming and optimistic tale filled with moments of dreamy exhilaration. *Fireflies* focuses on World

War II from a uniquely original perspective, weaving its narrative not so much from military action and the clamor of battle as from the tenacious and largely silent fight for survival engaging starving civilians. *Totoro*, for its part, dramatizes an essentially private rite of passage that takes as its point of departure a dramatically realistic theme but then uses this as a means of pursuing the path, more congenial to Miyazaki than to Takahata, of fantasy and myth.

Nevertheless, as argued further later in this chapter, fears and anxieties course through *Totoro*'s narrative as the experiences of Miyazaki's young protagonists inexorably unfold in the ever-present, sinister shadow of their mother's illness. Moreover, the dreamlike adventures initiated by the playful antics of an assortment of magical creatures are presented as occurrences tied to a specific phase of the children's lives and to be ultimately relinquished, in keeping with the unbending dicta of socialization. Relatedly, we are left with the feeling that although Miyazaki's heroines have, by the end of the movie, managed to negotiate successfully a problematic moment of their lives, the experience constitutes a beginning and not a resolution. Moreover, latent analogies between Miyazaki's and Takahata's films, despite their enormous differences in mood, can be detected not just in the treatment of the darker dimensions of their tales but also in their achingly beautiful depictions of the rural environment.

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A particularly important sequence, encapsulating *Totoro*'s ethical message, its grasp of child psychology and its approach to the humanity-nature relationship, is the one in which Mei and Satsuki join three Totoros in a nighttime dance around a newly sown garden patch to help the seedlings sprout. The sequence is both a ritual and a game.

The young girls' ability to take part in this ceremonial practice alongside the forest's magical creatures encapsulates one of the film's principal messages: the intimation that children tend to retain a connection with an Other, primordial world that does not respect rigid codes and fixed patterns of meaning. The sequence's concurrent status as a game serves as a reminder that although play is often considered a vital part of the process through which children develop into adults through the understanding and application of rules within given parameters, it is not merely a means of disciplining the young. In other words, it is not a monolithically regulatory discourse, for it is also capable of challenging adult principles of sense and purpose by pursuing its own idiosyncratic logic. Throughout the film, the fantastic is posited as a receptacle of energies from which the child protagonists may draw at times of uncertainty or grief. However, Miyazaki has been keen to stress that the visually gratifying dramatization of two children's closeness to nature — and indeed to its most mysteriously elating forces — should not be confused with the actual experiences undergone by real children. In a talk delivered when Miramax brought him over to the United States for the New York Film Festival and the grand domestic debut of *Princess Mononoke*, the director indeed stated:

> A very good friend of mine sent me a picture of his child kissing the television screen which had *My Neighbor Totoro* on. In the letter, he said, "My child loves your movie. He's watched it over and over and over and over again ... over 50 times now." I sent

> him a letter back immediately, saying he was making a terrible mistake. Once a year, maybe once in a lifetime, is really how often you should see any of my films.... Owning a little puppy will teach you a lot more about life than watching *Totoro* 100 times [quoted in Fritz 1999].

In personifying the regenerating powers of nature — a motif so central to Miyazaki's cinema — the Totoros concurrently function as mediators between the world of nature and the world of childhood, as they show Mei and Satsuki how to participate in the environment rather than merely observe its phenomena as detached onlookers. They are not, therefore, guardian angels in the traditional sense of the phrase but rather enablers — what nature offers, in the gentle but crystalline ethos of the movie, is not pure protection, which would ultimately reduce its recipients to the status of passive puppets, but rather a means of understanding and coming to terms with the values of free will, choice and responsibility. The integration of those larger-than-life forces of nature in an ordinary setting never feels gratuitously anachronistic or downright out of place since the children's encounters with them involve real emotions — however surrealistically rendered these may be — and such emotions, in turn, never degenerate into sheer sentimentalism.

If *Totoro* may appear to contain little action, compared to both *The Castle of Cagliostro* and Miyazaki's previous Ghibli productions, it should be borne in mind that its relatively sparse plot and nucleus of characters are attributes of a specific narrative tradition, that of the *dowa*— the Japanese term for a fantasy story aimed primarily at children. Intrinsic to this tradition is the presentation of events in such a way that they can be interpreted at once as products of a young imagination or as outcomes of natural causes. For instance, when Satsuki goes out into the courtyard at night to collect wood for the stove and is alarmed by a gust of wind whooshing past her, the moment could be read as a literal anticipation of the storm to come or, as later occurrences hint at, as an effect of Totoro flying past on his spinning top. Likewise, the spectacular sprouting of first a bunch of saplings and then a majestic tree could be seen as a "real" event induced by magical incantations (albeit one with only temporary consequences for the landscape), as a vision *shared* by Satsuki and Mei, or as just *one* of the two girls' dream resulting from exposure to a tantalizingly novel environment. The scene's ambiguity is heightened by a fleeting and unvoiced allusion to the possibility that Mr. Kusakabe may also have perceived something unusual at one point in the night.

In *Totoro*, Miyazaki returns to the theme of the relationship between the environment and humanity, but whereas in *Nausicaä*— as in *Mononoke* at a later stage — the emphasis is placed on the detrimental effects of human technology upon nature, here the situation is reversed, and the peacefulness of the Japanese countryside is shown to give Satsuki and Mei an opportunity to discover the essential pleasures in life — for example, the unexpected discovery of a small, clear pond teeming with tadpoles, or the sight of a vegetable garden yielding sun-soaked produce of mesmerizing beauty.

However, *Totoro* is not merely a documentary about the salutary repercussions of a child's encounter with some kind of Eastern neo-arcadia. Undeniably, the film's true magic is to be found in the lusciously detailed and vibrantly nuanced non-human char-

acters — the *susuwatari* (amiable dust-creatures with googly eyes that will make a spectacular reappearance in *Spirited Away*), the Nekobus ("Catbus"), above all the Totoros themselves. Yet, these creatures matter within the logic of the film not by providing some kind of theme-park escape from the quotidian but rather by encouraging the socialization of the young. In this respect, the film serves to remind us of *animé*'s enculturing function. According to Patrick Drazen, one of the central purposes of this art form is indeed to function as a means, for Japan, of "talking directly to itself, reinforcing its cultural myths and preferred modes of behavior" (Drazen 2003, p. viii). Relatedly, while *Totoro* pays homage to the emotional and intellectual resources of children in what could be described as a cumulatively hopeful tale, reminders of the ubiquitous incidence of loss and mourning are never far from the action and hence provide a realistically somber backdrop for the apparent levity of the fairy-tale-like plot.

Miyazaki's principal literary source for *Totoro* was undoubtedly *The Acorns and the Wildcat* (*Donguri to Yamaneko*) by the immensely popular storyteller and poet Kenji Miyazawa (1898–1933). The character of the Nekobus was inspired by a number of ancient Japanese legends revolving around old cats with shape-shifting powers, as well as Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat. Conversely, the Totoros — a hybrid species combining characteristics of the cat, the raccoon and the owl — are Miyazaki's own personal creations and the very epitome of his passion for fantastic bestiaries and zoologies. Above all, *Totoro* can be said to articulate an eminently personal mythology created on the basis of a keen sensitivity to the tension between the old and the new in Japanese culture at large. In an interview conducted by Noriaki Ikeda, the director has stated that he tends to view himself as an offspring of modernization and hence as alienated from tradition in spite of himself: "Japan modernizes itself. Totoro and his friends are transitional spectres that symbolize Japan's oscillation between tradition and modernity.... In this respect, I have also, regrettably, been modernized" (quoted in Bencivenni 2003, pp. 83–4; my translation).

Totoro also foregrounds the importance of understanding *animé* with reference to its social context and of appreciating the existence of culture-specific customs in its productions. As Drazen has noted, the scene in which Mei, Satsuki and their father take a bath together, for instance, "makes some Westerners nervous" (Drazen 2003, p. 52); yet, as Kittredge Cherry explains, Scrubbing and soaking together is a time-honored custom for all friends and family, especially children and their fathers. Many Japanese girls bathe with their fathers until puberty, while boys and fathers may continue sharing the tub for a lifetime" (Cherry 1987, p. 90).

The film as a whole abounds with subtle references to Japanese culture and customs: Satsuki's knee-walking reverential entry into the new house; the stone icons on the sides of the country lanes (a motif that also features in *Spirited Away* in the guise of lilliputian edifices said to have been built for the ceremonial housing of spirits); the folktale revolving around a crab affectionately tending a persimmon seed; the worship of the colossal camphor tree inspired by Shinto ritual. Designating Japan's indigenous religion, the term "Shinto" is literally translatable as "the way of the gods" and its gods (*kami*) and spirits (*rei*) are normally sacred entities that take the form of life-giving forces

such as wind, rain, mountains and rivers. Some prominent rocks are also worshipped as *kami*. In *Totoro*, elements of the Shinto religion can be detected in the old peasant's prayer; in Mr Kusakabe's homage to the Great Tree (*Tsukamori*), utilizing the traditional formula *Onegai itashimasu;*[2] and the shrines devoted to *Inari-san* (the Fox God) and *Jizo-san*. Jizo is an especially interesting figure in the context of Japanese folklore whose symbolic connotations could hardly be more relevant to Miyazaki's own story:

> Jizo is a beloved figure in Japan. Stone statues of Jizo wearing little handmade red bibs and caps are found everywhere. Jizo is considered the guardian of travellers and the protector of women and children [and] those who are ill.... Jizo represents a part of ourselves that is moved by the suffering of others and wishes to relieve it ... for Jizo there are no lost causes ["Who Is Jizo?"].

Another traditional element is the categorization of the young girls according to age lines, with Satsuki in the role of the responsible child (according to Japanese tradition, children are supposed to become sufficiently old to take responsibility when they turn seven) and Mei as the more dependent child in need of protection. However, being characteristically averse to the mechanical perpetuation of cultural clichés, Miyazaki also challenges this time-honored convention by presenting Mei as strong-willed and capable of acting by her own initiative. She is especially impressive in her unfaltering refusal to give in to the news of her mother's physical deterioration, and determination to convey to her the corn which she deems able to facilitate her recovery. Satsuki and Mei encapsulate different aspects of Miyazaki's own developing personality during childhood, when he would have experienced anxieties and fears feasibly analogous to those dramatized in the film due to his separation from his ailing mother. The director originally intended to have a single girl protagonist — which is still attested to in *Totoro*'s current version by the fact that both of their names mean the same thing: "Satsuki" derives from an old Japanese word signifying "the fifth month of the year," while "Mei" is a transcription of the Anglo-Saxon word "May."

The girls' father is also subtly characterized: in particular, he is rescued from the stultifyingly stereotypical category of the excessively rational adult into which so many parental figures are customarily sorted in Western animation by the movie's emphasis on his belief in the spirit world and willingness to accept the veracity of Mei's story regarding her encounter with a supernatural being. Thus, *Totoro* marks a clear break with the fantasy-story matrix whereby a young or powerless character claims to have come into contact with the ultramundane and is derided or simply ignored by grown-up or authoritative figures, with inevitably dire consequences (this blueprint is also recurrently followed, incidentally, by countless horror movies). The film's foregrounding of Mr Kusakabe's accepting attitude may partly be attributable to his educational background and professional standing (he is, after all, an anthropologist with something of a soft spot for haunted houses) but should also be evaluated with reference to the profound differences that exist between Miyazaki's cinema and Western animation. Indeed, as Daniel Thomas has stressed in his review of the film, what the Japanese director proposes and eloquently demonstrates through *Totoro* is the viability of

> an animated film without song-and-dance numbers; without a melodramatic, "evil" villain; without cloyingly cute talking animals; without preachy moral lessons; without parents who never indulge in their children's imaginations (what parent in an American movie would believe that their five-year-old spent an afternoon with an eight-foot-tall cat?). The children themselves — 10-year-old Satsuki and five-year-old Mei — are neither hip wisecrackers nor syrupy and dull, but wise portrayals, thoughtful portrayals. [Thomas 2004a].

The supporting character that plays a truly pivotal role in the story is Satsuki and Mei's mother. This is somewhat paradoxical when one considers that she only appears on the screen for about five minutes altogether. Nevertheless, it is Mrs. Kusakabe's removal from the bosom of the family due to her precarious health that implicitly motivates the film's entire action, from the move to the countryside presented in the opening sequence to the children's preternatural journey to the hospital in the closing part. The significance of the maternal figure in *Totoro* is perhaps best grasped with reference to Japanese society's attitudes to the roles of wife and mother. A woman's primary familial obligation lies with socializing her children within the home and, most importantly, with monitoring their academic development. In undertaking this mission, the mother may become oppressively authoritarian and thus gain, as Drazen observes, the nickname of "Emamogon, a maternal dragon" (Drazen 2003, p. 131).

Some of the mothers represented in *animé* incarnate precisely the prototype of the oppressively domineering figure alluded to in the closing part of the extract quoted above. Many others, however, are purely peripheral or used exclusively as befitting ways of advancing or complicating a particular storyline. According to Drazen, "Mothers tend to come off best in the movies of Hayao Miyazaki" (p. 137), even though much of the time they are made more conspicuous by their absence than by their presence. In both *Laputa* and *Mononoke*, for instance, the central characters are orphans who can only rely on surrogate maternal agents — in the forms of Ma Dola and Moro, respectively. In *Kiki*, somewhat as in *Totoro*, the protagonist's mother, Kokiri, is given an essentially secondary onstage part but plays a crucial offstage role as the person responsible for developing the young witch's sole semi-durable magical power, namely the ability to fly.

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Miyazaki's dedication to detailed and probing characterization is borne out by the image boards and character designs, showing the visual evolution of both the humans and the spirits created for the film, which can be found in the book *The Art of Totoro* (1988). Careful attention is given throughout to the rendition of Mei's exceptionally mobile facial features as she observes and enthusiastically endeavors to understand the fantastic creatures she encounters. Particularly memorable are the drawings exhibiting the young girl's confrontation with the elusive dust bunnies and, at a later stage, her refreshingly irreverent inspection of the sleeping Totoro's body. Her alternately amused, resolute and pugnacious expressions vividly encapsulate her strength of character, conveying the image of an inquisitive soul willing to be surprised and to take pleasure from her discoveries without the affliction of any rationalizing itch.

Body language, both in Miyazaki's preliminary drawings and in the finished animation, is used to differentiate Mei and Satsuki on the basis of age and personality. In the sequence showing the girls' gaiety and excitement upon arriving at their new home and embarking on its exploration, Satsuki's movements are exuberant, yet evince a sense of poise, maturity and self-control that make them appear significantly more elegant and balletic than Mei's. The latter, by contrast, convey a gusto for gleefully unrestrained tumbling and rollicking appropriate to her younger age. The girls' gestural interaction with the magical creatures is especially important in that it both concisely encapsulates their special connection with these aspects of the natural world and provides evidence for their mutually supportive attitudes at times of uncertainty or apprehension.

The loving attention to details observable in the character drawings is also evident in the depiction of the film's settings, and principally in the background paintings realized by art director Kazuo Oga and his team. The settings are underpinned by scrupulously drafted maps of the area as well as complex designs of the country house from various angles and in different lighting and atmospheric conditions, and of the interiors and props, many of which faithfully capture traditional Japanese styles and customs. Vegetation and architecture meet and merge in mutual suffusion, with water in its multiple configurations being consistently employed as a symbol of joyous vitality, and the sky — as always in Miyazaki — being accorded a lead role. This is particularly evident in the sequence in which Satsuki desperately searches for the missing Mei, where the pathos is largely evoked by the contrast between the promising golden glow illuminating one end of the horizon and the dark clouds casting ominous shadows upon the land at the opposite end. In some of the film's most visually distinctive sequences, rice fields and hills unravel before the spectator's eyes at an almost hypnotic pace that makes them intensely poetical presences in their own right. Even the simplest settings reveal, upon close inspection, unusual and manifold shadings, as exemplified by the segment depicting a gathering storm, where multiple, deepening shades of grey are progressively employed to evoke the prelude to a stunning atmospheric drama.

Totoro contains some of the most extreme expressions to be found in Miyazaki's entire opus, including some toothy laughs that are most unusual in the realm of *animé*— notably, in the course of the young protagonists' flying cruise aboard the jumbo leader of the Totoro clan. Among the facial depictions that convey most vividly the impression of emotional intensity are Mei's transitions from disappointment, through chagrin and frustration, to sheer angst upon being informed that her mother's health has taken a turn for the worse. Numerous tricks were employed by Miyazaki and his team in order to produce these effects. Especially useful, as a means of evoking compelling emotions while also avoiding formulaic shifts from one expression to another, is the *elongated in-between* — an intermediate drawing between two keyframes that deliberately distorts the character's face by lengthening it unnaturally in the "traveling position," so as to impart a smoother and more realistic pace to the motion. As Richard Williams explains, this animation technique was initially inspired by close observation of non-animated cinema and, specifically, by a recognition of the latter's own investment in a poetics of distortion: In the 1930s, when animators started studying live action film frame by

frame, they were startled by the amount of transparent blurs in the live images. In order to make their movements more convincing, they started using stretched in-betweens' (Williams 2001, p. 96).

One of the forms of elongation that *Totoro* employs most proficiently is the *zip turn*, where the transitional drawing between the image of a head facing right and that of the same head facing left is a grotesquely distorted visage incorporating elements of both of those images as well as a frontal view of the face. Equally effective is the movie's use of the *overlap* in the animation of various parts of the body. This refers to a technique whereby the drawing connecting two images of a normal-sized hand or foot, for instance, lengthens said hand or foot to an intentionally anomalous extent so as to make the movement appear more fluid and, if appropriate to the situation, even majestic. These techniques are used consistently in the rendition of the girls' expressions upon entering as yet unexplored portions of their new home, as these evolve through subtle modulations of mood and emotion — from curiosity, through wariness, to assertiveness, frequently culminating in wide-mouthed screams that convey both their fear and their courageous determination to confront whatever may be lingering in the gloom. This is a potent reminder that for children potentially frightening situations are never — as long as they can be approached in a gamesome spirit — totally devoid of a thrilling component. Concurrently, it confirms Miyazaki's acute sensitivity to child psychology, also evinced in his depiction of the two sisters' relation to nature.

The various techniques outlined above underscore the importance of the transitional frame between any two extremes and, specifically, its profound impact on characters and actions alike. Even though, for movie viewers, this frame remains unseen, any understanding of the art of animation and ability to genuinely appreciate the visible results of both facial and bodily motion will depend precisely on the ability to recognize its value. It is also worth noting, in this respect, that the distortions used in the animation of bodies and faces are paralleled, throughout *Totoro*, by analogous distortions in the representation of the film's settings and non-human characters. Especially prominent is the use of exaggerated perspective as a means of endowing certain scenes with a vivid sense of otherworldliness, as most memorably attested to by the images showing the Nekobus perched on the rooftop of the country house at night.

Changes in the weather and other atmospheric variations are effectively conveyed by animating the natural environment using to techniques that vibrantly emphasize its vitality and dynamism, such as the *wave* and *whip* patterns of motion. These are based on "[t]wo series of drawings done separately and interleaved with each other — giving endless possibilities of wobbles, judders, quivers and shakes" (Williams 2001, p. 300). These may consist, for instance, of a set of curves oriented from right to left interleaved with another set of curves oriented from left to right. Alternatively, they may consist of a set of drawings simulating the lines traced by a whip as it is raised and another simulating the lines traced by a whip as it descends. A typical example of the use of whip-and-wave effects is provided by the nocturnal scene in which Satsuki gathers wood for the stove as a storm gradually builds up around her, progressively stirring the entire ambience. Vibrations are a crucial means of investing nature with a potent and

all-embracing aura of aliveness and hence play a particularly prominent role, quite logically, in the sequences where Mei and Satsuki are seen to interact most intimately with their spirit friends.

Layers were used in *Totoro* with unprecedented levels of sophistication and — in a fashion that remains to this day commendable despite the achievements of digital technology — in shots and scenes that capitalize on the subtle play of light and shadow. For example, the bath sequence mentioned earlier derives atmospheric distinctiveness precisely from the ways in which the light shines with variable intensity and brightness on parts of the characters' bodies that emerge from the tub water and parts that are immersed in it, as well as on the soap suds that glisten down Satsuki's back and shoulders as — true to the Japanese bath ritual — she is getting properly washed prior to entering the tub, the actual immersion phase of the procedure being reserved for an appropriately cleansed body, for the prime purpose of relaxation.

The scene's mood is playful but — as is often the case in *Totoro* — also evocative of a residual sense of anxiety: indeed, while the domestic interior is warm and cozy, the surrounding countryside is agitated by a howling wind that appears to be shaking the old abode itself to its very foundations. This mixed tone is graphically captured by the heartening, yet somewhat ghostly, light beams filtering into the bathroom through the slits in the partitioning screen. Separate layers were produced for the less distinct portions of steam-infused gloom (it is here worth noting that the traditional Japanese bath uses substantially hotter water than its Western equivalent), for the less luminous beams, and for the brightly lit components of the scene. Layers were also employed in the rendition of clouds racing through the moonlit sky, and for the motion of rain falling with changing degrees of severity.

The action's overall effectiveness owes much to Miyazaki's approach to its timing, which reveals a willingness to avoid ordinary cadences and rhythms and experiment instead with deliberately accentuated impressions of either speed or slowness. For example, the early scenes in which Satsuki and Mei lean excitedly out of the moving truck in a vivacious effort to familiarize themselves with their new environment, and then proceed to dance and gambol around the garden, evoke an intense sense of energy and ebullience by underscoring the speed of the action. Conversely, the girls' exploratory journey through the house and up to the mysterious attic is compellingly slow. This sequence's hushed pace induces the audience to focus on diminutive and seemingly trivial details, such as a portion of the wall running along the steep staircase, simultaneously augmenting the general atmosphere of suspense, tentativeness and anticipation.

One of the most effective uses of an intentionally sluggish pace can be found in the deeply moving bus-stop sequence, where the impression of slowness is reinforced by the pervasive silence, deftly punctuated by the murmur of the rain and by the big Totoro's guttural utterances.[3] This scene could be said to anticipate the emphatically slow and deliciously melancholy train journey that takes Sen, Kaonashi and their miniature animal companions to Zeniba's cottage in *Spirited Away*. It is worth noting, in this respect, that train sequences are used as silently dignified opportunities for sober reflection in other Ghibli productions, from *Fireflies* to *Whisper of the Heart*.

7

Grave of the Fireflies

Prior to *Grave of the Fireflies*, Takahata had directed *Chie the Brat* (*Jarinko Chie*), a story based on the popular *manga* by Etsumi Haruki, in the forms of both a feature film (produced by Knack and released in 1981) and a TV series comprising 64 episodes (produced by Tokyo Movie Shinsha and aired from October 1981 to March 1983). *Chie* dramatizes the exploits of the young daughter of an unemployed *yakuza* who is forced to look after her separated and squabbling parents' catering business while they are absorbed in their own predicaments and, considering this rather bleak subject-matter, is surprisingly very humorous and visually endearing.

Takahata also directed the feature *Gauche the Cellist* (*Sero Hiki no Goushu*, 1982; OH Production), a story based on a work written by one of the director's favorite authors: the poet and novelist Kenji Miyazawa, whose fiction is also behind *Totoro*. Gauche is a cellist of limited talent, who plays for the local town orchestra and is blamed for the group's inability to play in unison only a few days away from a concert. The protagonist — whose dream is to equal Beethoven — practices perseveringly well into the night but to no avail — until a team of small animals consisting of a cat, a cuckoo, a badger and a mouse come to visit him and assiduously inculcate in the aspiring musician the virtues of patience and rigor and, most importantly, the value of communication. Unless Gauche truly wishes to communicate with others via his music, playing will be no more than a mechanical and unrewarding chore.

Takahata's last directorial accomplishment before *Fireflies* was *The Story of Yanagawa Canals* (*Yanagawa Horiwari Monogatari*, 1987), an award-winning live-action documentary produced by Miyazaki's personal office, Nibariki, which chronicles the efforts of the people of Yanagawa Town to preserve their historical canals and free them from pollution. An ecologically committed project, the documentary echoes aspects of both Takahata's and Miyazaki's earlier works and anticipates later Studio Ghibli productions.

As Takahata himself has observed, the fact that *Fireflies*[1] — based on a semi-autobiographical novel by Nosaka Akiyuki — was released as a double-feature with *My Neighbor Totoro* had a profound impact on audience responses: "those who saw *Totoro* first didn't want to see *Fireflies* to the end," while "those who saw *Fireflies* first didn't have the problem" (Takahata 2004). With its frank exposure of wartime violence, brutality and suffering in an affecting tale centered on two children from the city of Kobe

rendered homeless and motherless by a bombing raid[2] and its culmination in the death from starvation of its protagonists, *Fireflies* is hardly what one could term an ordinary animation. Its themes and imagery are indeed more at home with live-action cinema — for instance, as Roger Ebert has pointed out, with Italian neorealism and, specifically, the works of De Sica and Rossellini.

The critic has also observed that even though one "would never think of this as an *animé* subject," if *Fireflies* had been a live-action film, it would inevitably have been "bogged down in realism," and the resulting work would not have been "as pure, as abstract." The "*idea* of a little girl who's starving" was Takahata's principal concern and therefore, the image of an actual child actor "might get in the way of the *meaning* of the image" (Ebert 2004). Stylization, a key component of all *animé* at its best, is here posited as the director's aesthetic and ethical priority, and a means of producing potent affective reactions not by mimetically reproducing empirical reality but through the discriminating distillation and simplification of actual occurrences. This is borne out most effectively by the silent sequence of snapshot memories of his sister Setsuko that flit through Seita's mind after her demise.

For Ebert, "*Grave of the Fireflies* is an emotional experience so powerful that it forces a rethinking of animation. Since the earliest days, most animated films have been 'cartoons' for children and families. Recent animated features such as *The Lion King*, *Princess Mononoke* and *The Iron Giant* have touched on more serious themes, and the *Toy Story* movies and classics like *Bambi* have had moments that moved some audience members to tears. But these films exist within safe confines; they inspire tears, but not grief" (Ebert 2000). *Fireflies*, conversely, does not simply offer *signs* of grief, it *is* grief. There is no coded rhetoric intended to alleviate the anguish of death, of its intimation, and of its aftermath. Thus, the film puts us in touch with undiluted, inconsolable and consummate woe, which no vague promises of otherworldly rewards could ever sublimate, and which the bucolic beauty of nature amplifies with harrowing irony. This effect is achieved by means of stark visual contrasts and juxtapositions. On the one hand, the movie earnestly foregrounds the assaults on civilian areas marking some of the most destructive military operations in the whole of world history and the attendant deluge of black rain caused by ash-bloated clouds, unsentimentally exposing images of charred, disfigured and fly-infested corpses, of crawling maggots, of appalling injuries and of the direst (both physiological and mental) symptoms of severe malnutrition. On the other hand, it persistently celebrates the glorious resilience of the natural environment in the face of the most abominable manifestations of human folly by throwing into relief the blissful tranquility of fields and ponds, the majestic serenity of the ocean, the kaleidoscopic richness of the sky and the sheer beauty of myriad creatures — seagulls, dragonflies, crabs and, of course, the eponymous fireflies themselves — rendered with achingly luscious painterliness.

Fireflies evokes a ubiquitous sense of powerlessness right from the opening scene, in which the horribly emaciated body of the dying Seita is seen slumped against a pillar in a vast train station, regarded by both passersby and maintenance staff with a mix of dismay and revulsion. The atmosphere of unrelieved gloom evoked by the film (not

only in its explicit presentations of violence and suffering but also in its deliberately ironical contemplations of an idyllic world grotesquely incongruous with the horrors of war) is underscored by the protagonists' fate after their untimely departures. Indeed, their depiction as wandering ghosts, imprisoned in a liminal zone that offers no relief but, in fact, only a callous reiteration of their ordeal ad infinitum suggests that the most intractably tragic side of their vicissitudes is not their having lost their lives but the intimation that there is no posthumous peace for them to enjoy. The film, therefore, refuses to indulge in recuperative visions guaranteeing the return of the earth to the earth and of ashes to ashes. This chilling realization gains pathos at the end of the film if one considers, retrospectively, that peace is precisely what the protagonists have been longing for all along. This is eloquently borne out by the scenes in which Setsuko digs miniature graves for the fireflies that she and Seita capture in order to illuminate their shelter, as a metaphorical version of the tomb she imagines her mother's body to occupy.

The ghost motif is accorded pivotal importance,—even though the scenes featuring Seita and Setsuko as ghosts are neither particularly numerous nor protracted,—because as they punctuate the action in such a way as to invest an otherwise purely linear narrative with a sense of multidimensional coherence. Visually, the scenes in question stand out due to their distinctively unearthly, firefly-sprinkled red glow, and due to their presentation of the protagonists as fully garbed in the very same, undamaged clothes in which they first set out on their fateful voyage. Two main ghost sequences frame the movie: the early one in which Seita and Setsuko appear first in a field and then in a deserted train carriage, and the final scene in which the two sit on a low wall regarding the city together and the elder sibling tells his sister that it is "time for bed." There is something excruciatingly derisive, indeed almost sardonic, about Seita's closing words, since the film as a whole has made it patent that no rest or respite is available for its hapless protagonists either in life or in death.

Carefully placed between these two key sequences are a few spectral interludes: the scene in which Seita and Setsuko reach the end of their eerily melancholy train journey and emerge into a hostile-looking nocturnal setting—which could be read as a symbolic anticipation of the initially distant and ultimately glacial attitude displayed by their aunt towards their predicament; the brief but unforgettable scene in which Seita's phantasm recalls Setsuko's inconsolable grief upon her dead mother's kimonos being taken away and covers his ears in a vain attempt to muffle the audible reminiscence of her distraught sobbing; the scene where the protagonists' ghosts observe their living incarnations from a hilltop in the setting that will eventually provide Seita's and Setsuko's last vestige of a home; the minimalist shot following Setsuko's revelation that she is aware of her mother's death (despite Seita's having endeavored to keep the truth from her), in which the camera simply focuses on the box containing the woman's ashes in a corner of the firefly-specked shelter.[3] The ghostly element is also reinforced by the use of nostalgic flashbacks, specifically in the scenes in which Seita revisits a joyful time spent on the beach with his mother and sister, the taking of a family photograph in the course of a *hanami*,[4] and the mesmerizing lights and splendid fireworks of a naval parade.

It is also notable that Akiyuki has described *Fireflies* as "a double-suicide [*shinjuu*] story." The full import of the phrase may only be adequately appreciated if one takes into account its culturally specific connotations. Double-suicide stories are bound up with the *bunraku* ("puppet") plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725), which pivot on the principle of loyalty and on the often unsuccessful struggle to reconcile within that principle societal obligations (*giri*) and personal sentimental attachments (*ninjou*). For Seita and Setsuko, *giri* is epitomized by their aunt's family structure and its traditional customs and beliefs: an arrangement within which they can find no proper place or peace. Unable, at the same time, to work for a living, they are further cut off from society and its expectations. In terms of *shinjuu*, their inability to belong dictates that the only viable way-out is death.

The blood-tie precludes the possibility of an erotic connection between Seita and Sestuko of the kind normally included in classic double-suicide plays, "hence a sublimation takes place" whereby Seita acts as his little sister's "guardian" and Setsuko, in turn, "assumes the role of his mother at times" (for instance, after he has been fiercely beaten up for stealing vegetables) and even "the role of his lover"—though this aspect is handled in a purely platonic vein, as demonstrated by the scene in which Seita embraces his sister in sleep and she insists on being left alone ("Interview with Nosaka Akiyuki and Isao Takahata"). Structurally, however, the two children's predicament does partake of the formal setup of the traditional *shinjuu* tale insofar as "the days leading up to their death are like the development of a love story," the creation of an intimate world that exists "just for the two of them" as a kind of personal "heaven." Takahata has corroborated the idea that his source narrative has the typical flavor of a Chikamatsu play but has also stressed that what attracted him most to Akiyuki's work was exactly the notion of that ephemeral heaven, and that this was the dimension he sought to capture most poignantly in his cinematic adaptation of *Hotaru no Haka* ("Interview with Nosaka Akiyuki and Isao Takahata").

However, the film's adherence to established conventions does not at any point steer it into the domain of cliché. As Patrick Drazen has noted, this proposition is confirmed by an apparently marginal but actually very telling moment: namely, the scene in which the 19th-century American ballad "Home Sweet Home," which could in itself be deemed "corny and saccharine," "is played ... as the camera surveys for the last time the swampy home of the two dead children" (Drazen 2003). Whereas as a musical background to the image of a character's cushy abode the ballad would indeed have come across as a hackneyed formula, its employment in the presentation of one of the movie's most disconsolate sequences has a profoundly defamiliarizing effect. Through its earnest rejection of platitudes, *Fireflies* ultimately etches itself into one's memory by activating concurrently captivating and agonizing recollections without ever compromising the artistic and ethical balance of those affective poles.

8

Kiki's Delivery Service

Having attracted 2,640,000 spectators of all ages across Japan, *Kiki* went on to become the first movie released in English under the Tokuma/Disney Deal, and its outstanding sales instantly confirmed the desirability of that arrangement. Its achievement was all the more impressive when one considers that its entirely traditional animation was pitted against two CGI productions also released in 1989: Pixar's *A Bug's Life* and Dreamworks' *Antz*. Moreover, *Kiki*'s release had initially been hampered by a right-wing organization's attempt to boycott it on the grounds that its representation of the quest for independence away from the parental home and parallel celebration of magical skills disrupted family values.[1]

When *Kiki* was first released in the West, it would have been tempting for some potential viewers to dismiss it as a trivial kids movie. In fact, it turned out to be one of those rare coming-of-age tales capable of appealing to audiences on both sides of adolescence, as well as to people in the heroine's own age group. The film persuasively demonstrates Miyazaki's ability to depict sympathetically, yet unsentimentally, the developing individual's hopes, disappointments, failures and achievements — and indeed their inextricability from one another — and to infuse the scenes in which these unfold with a warm, humane humor that never degenerates into cartoon slapstick. *Kiki* thus exposes the essential narrow-mindedness of the critical and cultural approach that has conditioned Western audiences to conceive of animation solely in terms of patronizingly simplistic productions unwilling to treat their spectators as adults.

In its deliberate avoidance of the stereotypical motifs that characterize much Disney-based animation — idealized heroes and heroines, cackling villains, comical helpers and climactic battles or duels — *Kiki* may appear somewhat low-key to Western spectators accustomed to this well-established visual fare. What is more, the protagonist is scarcely superhuman given, as discussed further later in this section, that her magical powers are not only rather limited but also ephemeral. Nonetheless, what makes the film quite unique is precisely its departure from the familiar path at the levels of both plot and character portrayal, its shunning of theatrical bombast and its gentle exposure of both human vulnerability and human kindness. As Mark Schilling has noted, this aspect of the production is thrown into relief by unobtrusive scenes which do not overtly contribute to the development of the narrative, yet strike vital affective

chords. Commenting on the protagonist's experience of embarrassment, specifically, the critic has cited the following instance:

> After spending her first night at the home of a baker and his wife, Kiki wakes up and, still in her nightgown, steps outside.... She trots down the steps, dashes into the outhouse and, a few moments later, peeps out. To her surprise, she sees the baker — a young, silent giant — stretching his muscles.... The moment he is out of sight, she runs back up the steps, dives into her room and shuts the door, breathing hard. The scene does absolutely nothing to advance the plot and the humour in it is low (Disney would reject it out of hand), but in Miyazaki's hands it wordlessly — and eloquently — expresses Kiki's youth, vulnerability and isolation [Schilling 1989].

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Kiki is based on the novel of the same title by the popular author of children's stories Eiko Kadono. Miyazaki's film aims at depicting a learning curve whose pleasurable rewards are counterbalanced by disappointments and anxieties. Kadono's book, conversely, is a fundamentally light-hearted and episodic (rather than overtly developmental) tale. Nevertheless, it occasionally touches on darker themes, such as the conflict between the principles of modesty and tolerance, which Kiki's mother seeks to inculcate in the young girl, and the protagonist's own belief in the importance of ambitious self-assertiveness, as well as the bathetic deflating of Kiki's passion for adventure by overly cautious people and dull situations.

In his preface to the book *The Art of Kiki's Delivery Service* (1990), Miyazaki has stated that although he viewed the original tale as "a fine work of children's literature warmly depicting the gulf that exists between independence and reliance," and was hence willing to remain faithful to this aspect of Kadono's work, he also sought to enhance the sociopolitical relevance of the story by making his adaptation of it reflect more faithfully "the spirit of our young girls living in the capital today." As a result, the Kiki portrayed in the movie would "suffer stronger setbacks and [more] loneliness than in the original." The most momentous setback, undeniably, is Kiki's loss of the ability to fly — which has no direct equivalent in the original, where the protagonist merely has to put up with a broken broom and the resulting need to fix it.

This shift of tone, which Miyazaki considered indispensable to the achievement of a dramatically cogent representation of the vicissitudes inherent in the processes of self-discovery and self-development, was principally inspired by a recognition of the cultural distinctiveness of contemporary notions of *independence*: "At one time the main characters of stories for young people gained financial independence, which was then equal to spiritual independence, after struggling through difficulties. In today's society, however, where anyone can earn money going from one temporary job to another, there is no connection between financial independence and spiritual independence. In this era, poverty is not so much material as spiritual."(*The Art of Kiki's Delivery Service*)

Moreover, Kiki's obligation to live for a year in a foreign city and use her skills so that people will acknowledge her as a proper witch allegorically mirrors a rampant cultural phenomenon:

> It is like someone who wants to be a cartoonist coming alone to Tokyo. Today there are said to be around 300,000 young men and women who are hoping to make it as cartoonists. Being a cartoonist is not that unusual a job. It is comparatively easy to get started and to make some sort of living. But a characteristic of modern life is that once the needs of daily life are taken care of the real problem of self-realization begins. Kiki is protected by mother's old but well-looked-after broom, she has the radio that was a gift from father, and the black cat she is so close to that it is almost like a part of herself, but Kiki's heart wavers between isolation and longing for human company. In Kiki's life we see reflected the lives of so many young Japanese girls today who are loved and supported economically by their parents, but who long for the bright lights of the city ... therefore, in this movie ... we must give serious treatment to the problem of independence [*The Art of Kiki's Delivery Service*; p. 7].

Kadono was not at all happy with the changes introduced by Miyazaki, yet was also at the receiving end of vitriolic attacks from the Yamato company, who had actually coined the word "Takkyuubin" in the first place and used as a logo the black cat on which the character of Jiji is based. Eventually, all parties involved were happily reconciled thanks to the movie's enormous success.

Miyazaki also wished to transcend the stereotype of the young witch popularized by numerous TV animations, where "the witchcraft has always merely been the means to fulfill the dreams of young girls. They have always become idols with no difficulties. The witch of *Kiki's Delivery Service* does not possess that convenient kind of power. The talents of the witch of this film are really little more than those possessed by any real-life girl" (*The Art of Kiki's Delivery Service*, p. 8). Latent vestiges of the formulaic sort of witch figure celebrated in much television *animé* can be detected in the character of the older witch encountered by Miyazaki's protagonist on her maiden voyage: a rather sassy and utterly unruffled teenager who has found her vocation in fortune-telling and therefore feels entitled to devote her entire attention to romantic matters.

In depicting the protagonist's rite-of-passage move to a witchless town and survival therein by her skills, *Kiki* also places considerable emphasis on the values of politeness and propriety, corroborating the idea that *animé* indeed serves a socializing purpose. The cultural distinctiveness of these principles in the context of Japan should not be underestimated. Indeed, while some Western spectators may view them merely as facets of a formal and fundamentally superficial notion of etiquette, they are actually rooted in the traditional experience of belonging to a world where one is never quite alone and where it is accordingly crucial to learn how to interact constantly with others and to respect their places within the group, while also preserving the legitimacy of one's own situation. These values spring largely from Japan's demographic reality as a country wherein both the population and its economic activities are massively concentrated in a relatively small portion of the overall national territory. These concerns are frequently articulated in *animé* by recourse to plots that highlight the ambiguous value of isolation, intimating that in spite of an inveterate proclivity among diverse cultures to idealize this condition, the choice of a deliberately secluded existence also denies any comforting sense of belonging. Nevertheless, the figure of the "lone wolf" as Drazen

designates it, has persistently infiltrated Japanese lore for time immemorial (Drazen 2003, p. 36). *Kiki* partakes of this ancient tradition by dramatizing the importance of belonging, gregariousness and mature perception of one's place in society on the one hand and yearning for independence and a room of one's own on the other.

What matters most, according to Helen McCarthy, is that by the end of the film, the protagonist "has found her own place in life, and she's done it through her own efforts" (McCarthy 1999, p. 153). No less important, however, is the element of both visual and psychological defamiliarization involved in this resolution and indeed in many of the incidents leading up to *Kiki*'s dénouement for, as Susan Napier convincingly maintains, "Traits that might have been taken for granted had the protagonist been a boy ... are freshly highlighted through Kiki's femininity to create a memorable coming-of-age story" (Napier 2001, pp. 132–133). Miyazaki's impatience with stereotypical characters is not only evinced by this intriguing gender inversion but also explicitly revealed by his representation of the film's animals, both domestic and wild, as a subtle cocktail of benevolence and aggressiveness, compassion and selfishness. Even Jiji — whom Kiki describes as "her best friend" early in the movie — does not hesitate to neglect her when a white-furred feline bimbo appears on the scene, despite the young witch having reached, by this juncture, her emotional nadir.

In assessing Miyazaki's characterization of his protagonist, it should be borne in mind that witches are proverbially ambiguous beings, upon whom whole societies have insistently projected both their fears and their desires. Throughout history, so-called sorceresses and enchantresses have been demonized as aberrant, dangerous and sometimes seductive females; and their persecution, accordingly, has been justified as a holy crusade. At the same time, however, witches have been accorded a place in society — albeit not always explicitly or even consciously — as repositories of traditional wisdom.

The witch figure in *Kiki* is designed according to Western conventions, as evinced by the typical attributes of the black cat, the black dress and the broom, but is free of any diabolical connotations. Thus, the film implicitly reminds us that witches only came to be regarded as sinister creatures as a result of Catholic persecution, having previously been regarded as an important component of rural culture due to their healing and reparative powers. These ancient skills are still evident in the flair as an herbalist evinced by Kokiri, the heroine's mother, and in Kiki's ability to fix and operate Madame's old oven.[2]

The artist Ursula, with her remarkable skills, independent disposition, sense of humor and — most crucially — keen grasp of the importance of understanding the authentic nature of one's calling and faculties, could be seen as both Kiki's role model and her prospectively realized alter ego. Above all, the artist is instrumental to Kiki's conscious understanding and mature appropriation of her own skills; the artist reveals to the younger girl that her own passion for painting had at one point been severely dampened by the realization that she was merely emulating the efforts of others and that working towards the discovery of an individual style had indeed entailed no less pain and frustration than pleasure and a sense of self-fulfilment. Arguably voicing some of Miyazaki's own feelings about art and creativity, Ursula admits to still finding the

production process emotionally and physically exacting but is capable of generously accommodating this unsavory lesson because she has also come to realize that a certain element of suffering is occasionally inevitable.

Paradoxically, Kiki has to lose her talent in order to genuinely find it: in a film that patently lacks overtly or ambivalently infamous characters, the only evil consists of the doubts and fears which Kiki has to contend with in order to comprehend the nature of her art. That evil, which is initially a disabling flaw, actually becomes a strength at the point at which the individual realizes that being vulnerable to pain and disappointment does not unequivocally mean being bound to fail, for a modicum of vulnerability is also what makes us open to novel ideas and lessons — in other words, what makes us human.

The achievement of independence, as both Ursula's and Kiki's experiences show, is a process beset by economic worries, the ever-present specter of unwelcome solitude and, most importantly, the painful recognition that our talents can never be taken for granted but must, in fact, be studiously embraced if they are to become truly ours — which entails the frightening possibility of their permanent or temporary loss.

According to Michael Lane, one of *Kiki*'s most distinctive features is the use of *white moments*. This term was coined by Daniel Meyer to designate those moments in a story "when the heart warms and expands" (quoted in Lane 2004, p. 1). Closely related to this formulation are Donald Richie's speculations regarding the impact of a certain type of image in the films of Miyazaki's most passionate fan ever, the epoch-making director Akira Kurosawa, namely:

> the irrational rightness of an apparently gratuitous image in its proper place ... part of the beauty of such scenes is that they are "thrown away" as it were, that they have no place, that they do not ostensibly contribute, that they even constitute what has been called bad film-making. It is not the beauty of these unexpected images, however, that captivates ... but their mystery. They *must* remain unexplained [Richie 1996, p. 105].

Examples of such seemingly insignificant moments that are actually endowed with inexplicable intensity include the scene in which Kiki's father says, "When did you get so big?" and then

> lifts her up like when she was little and she collapses on his neck in a big hug. The first white moment. It wouldn't be a white moment if the music and actors didn't conspire with the animation and the sympathy with the characters from previous scenes to make it one.... How do I know it is a white moment? My eyes well up with tears every time I see it. Would everyone respond the same way? ... I believe that anyone who can be moved by white moments at all will be moved by this one [Lane 2004].

Other instances of analogously potent emotions that are made all the more effective by their latent elusiveness include Osono's look of delighted surprise when she first sees Kiki take off on her broom to return the misplaced pacifier to its rightful owner; Kiki hugging the ostensibly gruff Mr. Osono when she returns to the bakery and finds a brand new sign advertising her delivery service in the window; Kiki's and Tombo's out-

burst of semi-hysterical laughter following the comically catastrophic climax of the ride to the beach on the boy's experimental vehicle. Further moments in the film that are not explicitly cited in Lane's article but would feasibly qualify as legitimate "white moments" are Kiki's discovery of the friendly cows in the train that has provided her and Jiji with shelter during her maiden journey, upon having her foot affectionately licked by one of the animals; Kiki's first sight of Ursula's completed painting, where a stylized version of her own face features prominently[3]; and (perhaps some viewers would regard this example as *the* white moment par excellence) the scene in which Madame presents Kiki with a cake adorned with an image of the little witch on her broom in a grateful acknowledgment of the girl's selfless goodwill.

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Kiki's animation directors (Shinji Otsuka, Katsuya Kondou and Yoshifumi Kondou) concentrated on harmonizing the technical and affective qualities of the film's various sequences so as to evoke an overall sense of dynamic balance even as the action shifted from contemplative stillness to frantic motion, from bucolic peace to urban bustle, from idle repose to anxious restlessness. The film, as a result, has a uniquely smooth flavor by means of which contrasting images are elegantly interwoven rather than starkly juxtaposed. This approach to animation mirrors the film's thematic preoccupations, the transition from childhood to adulthood being posited *both* as slow, reflective and dream-like, and as rapid, turbulent and disruptive. Joe Hisaishi's musical score bolsters with great poignancy the animation style just described by documenting musically the heroine's rite of passage: especially touching, in this respect, is the melody accompanying Kiki's contemplation of Ursula's finished painting.

Kiki's fluid animation is bolstered by the varied use of a number of camera actions and corresponding effects. A few of the principal cinematographical operations deployed in the production of the movie are itemized and illustrated below.

Focus—This use of the camera refers to an operation whereby a particular section of a scene or location is called attention to—e.g. the shot of the window in Kiki's room with moonlight flooding through as she sleeps.

Pan—This term designates a camera action in which the camera itself is stationary and the illusion of movement is effected by its successive capture of elements of a scene across a horizontal plane (in contrast with the *Tilt*, where the plane involved is vertical). This action can be observed in the transition from the shot of the window mentioned above to the view of Kiki in her bed with the broomstick propped against the bedstead. *Focus* and *Pan* are also used in the sequence where Kiki's parental home is presented as the initial center of attention, and a detailed survey of the garden's myriad flowers, shrubs and herbs is then proposed. The *Pan* is an especially versatile move, which can be employed in order to follow a moving object or character or in order to show more visual content than could be fitted into a single frame. This use of the move is demonstrated by the numerous sequences that show Kiki flying over Koriko's busy streets or over the surrounding countryside as well as in her first foray into the city,

when she narrowly escapes collision with a bus bearing the "Studio Ghibli" caption on its side (one of Miyazaki's favorite in-jokes). The *Pan* move also enables filmmakers to establish physical connections between two or more points within a particular geographical context or to suggest symbolic links: in the case of the scene set in Kiki's room, the camera succinctly connects the moon and the witch figure, whereas in the case of the garden scene the suggested link is between Kiki's mother and her medicinal skills.

Fade in, fade out (*F.I.,F.O.*) — This move is used most effectively in scenes that show varying lighting and atmospheric conditions, both within the boundaries of the urban setting and in its surroundings, by gently drawing the viewer in and out of a specific cityscape, landscape or seascape.

Tracking (*T.U., T.B.*) — In this operation, the camera literally follows an image — rather than remaining stationary as in the *Pan* move — and is employed to remarkable effect in the scene displaying Ursula's painting, as the viewer's eyes are first driven to look up towards it from the cabin's entrance, and then encouraged to inspect its various images across the surface of the entire work. This technique serves to convey the impression that the painting entails a narrative progression and symbolically underscores the incremental creative process leading to its current configuration.

Superimposition — This technique consists of filming one scene over another and was used, for instance, in the production of the images showing the bakery through its display window from the street, with Tombo running past the shop, imposed over images of the inside, with Kiki and Osono assisting their customers.

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Kiki evinces a sophisticated approach to the use of animated walks as a vital means of individualizing the attitudes and personalities of different characters, both central and secondary. As Richard Williams has observed, "everyone's walk is as individual and distinctive as their face. And one tiny detail will alter everything. There's a massive amount of information in a walk, and we read it instantly ... ask yourself: are they old? Young? What's their financial position? State of health? Are they strict? Permissive? Depressed? Hopeful? Sad? Happy? Drunk?" (Williams 2001, p. 104). The minimal, yet crucially important, differences alluded to by Williams clearly play a major part in the characterization of *Kiki*'s central character: while her walking style in the early part of the film conveys the image of a carefree young girl innocently rejoicing at the sight of racing clouds and glorious flowers, her gait as she moves through the big city shortly after her tumultuous arrival and is accosted by Tombo suggests a disabling lack of confidence, poorly disguised as prissy self-composure.

Miyazaki and his team employ various stratagems in order to create specific walks that can convincingly encapsulate salient character traits, by bending joints where appropriate and carefully choreographing the relative positions of shoulders and hips, arms and torsos, ascending bodies and descending hair and drapery. Thus, even relatively simple tricks can lead to the evocation of attitudes as diverse as the sprightly disposition of a young girl like Kiki herself, the ponderousness of elderly figures such as Madame

and Bertha, the determination of a radiantly self-confident and independent woman like Ursula, or the pride of a mother-to-be like Mrs. Osono.

Concomitantly, the animation style used in *Kiki* underscores the paramount importance of techniques capable of conveying a character's flexibility without, however, compromising its solidity, and thus ending up with jumbles of rubbery limbs. This is especially notable in the depiction of the protagonist's changing patterns of motion in relation to her broom, depending on whether she is learning, *un*learning or *re*learning how to fly, and accordingly exhibiting various degrees of control or hesitation, confidence or tension, elegance or clumsiness. The flying sequences bear full witness to Miyazaki's profound understanding of flexibility as the process, in Williams's words, whereby "[p]eople *unfold*, one part start[ing] first, generating the energy for other parts to follow ... things don't start or end at the same time. Various parts of the body overlap each other" (Williams 2001, p. 230). The value of flexibility is also foregrounded in the representation of animal characters — primarily Jiji, whose distinctively fluid style of motion serves to emphasize his blasé air of cat-about-town. When the loss of a toy cat to be delivered as a birthday present forces Jiji to impersonate the stuffed animal until the original gift can be retrieved, his customary flexibility is ironically replaced by inanimate stiffness — glistening sweat drops occasioned by the proximity of an ultimately friendly but threateningly real dog being the only trace of aliveness accorded to the unfortunate feline thespian. In the handling of walks and flexibility alike, the overall outcome is a typically Miyazakian coalescence of magical moods and immaculately construed animation.

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One of the film's most remarkable visual features resides with Miyazaki's depiction of urban architecture at its most elaborate and picturesquely detailed. If it is true that the sky is frequently the most distinctively dynamic component of the typical Miyazaki landscape, in the case of *Kiki* it could be argued that the myriad buildings, lush colors and dazzling reflections of its fictional European-style setting are no less alive. The city of Koriko, a dazzling phantasmagoria of stone, brick, slate, marble and terra cotta, is an architectural collage of elements drawn from urban settings as diverse as Amsterdam, Paris, Naples, Lisbon, San Francisco and, above all, Stockholm, which Miyazaki had visited and much admired in the 1970s while working on the eventually aborted project for an adaptation of Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking*. As Alessandro Bencivenni has noted, Miyazaki's liking for the Swedish capital and decision to adopt it as his main model in the animation of *Kiki* is, in a sense, entirely logical:

> City of the Nobel Prize, symbol of intellectual openness, pacifism and tolerance, it is the perfect setting for a moral tale which Miyazaki has chosen to situate in a parallel universe where World War Two has not taken place, nor has urbanization depleted the natural environment [Bencivenni 2003, p. 96; my translation].

At the same time, Miyazaki has underscored the idealized character of his architectural vision by amalgamating stylistic traits and fashions that are characteristic of

quite distinct epochs. Thus, the film features both elegant eighteenth-century buildings and functional structures typical of the 1960s, its vehicles and accessories conveying an analogous impression of cross-temporality. The black-and-white TV sets, for example, would appear to belong to the 1950s, while the automobiles exhibit designs drawn predominantly from the 1940s, and the most conspicuous flying machine in the entire movie (beside the protagonist's broom, of course) is a dirigible — i.e. a relic from the 1930s.

In this regard, the film fully demonstrates the director's commitment to the creation of cinematic space as more than a derivative imitation of real-life locations. Miyazaki is deeply concerned with the elaboration of a specifically filmic architecture. *Kiki* conveys this aesthetic message by enthusiastically advocating the necessity of breaking set design free from purely decorative requirements and of transforming it into an autonomous art. The set designer, accordingly, should not be regarded as a craftsman's assistant in the studio but as an independently creative artist whose contribution plays a pivotal role in endowing a movie with its particular style.

It is worth noting, in this context, that conceptions and representations of space in film are based on an intimate bond between the artistic and technological dimensions of architecture. The dialogue between cinema and architecture has a long history. Indeed, it has been evolving since the 1920s through a plethora of films engaged in the representation of the modern city as both a metaphor for social reality and as a means of speculating about possible futures. Thus, images of urban architecture in cinema have increasingly come to stand for concurrently actual and virtual embodiments of philosophical questions regarding our place in the world — the ways in which our cultural identities are defined by the spatial coordinates within which we come to be situated through choice, enablement, coercion or prohibition.

The imaginative potential of sustained encounters between film and architecture was vividly grasped by Virginia Woolf in the mid-1920s when, commenting specifically on Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1920), she remarked enthusiastically that the new medium had the capacity to conjure up a "dream architecture of arches and battlements, of cascades falling and fountains rising, which sometimes visits us in sleep or shapes itself in half-darkened rooms. No fantasy could be too farfetched or insubstantial" (Woolf 1926; reprinted in Geduld 1972, p. 86). Alluding to cinema's possibly unrivalled powers in the evocation of space, these reflections are arguably more apposite to the world of animation than to any other form of cinema — given animation's relative disengagement from the laws of physics and from the rule of reason — and especially to Miyazaki's intrepid syntheses of the mundane and the preternatural, the prosaic and the spellbinding, the indigenous and the imported, in an enrapturing cinematographical mélange of ancient and contemporary sceneries.

The magic of cinematic sets is arguably most bewitching when architectural structures are purpose-built for a specific movie — as is inevitably the case with animation though not with live-action cinema — for it is at that point that genuinely new or alternative worlds come into being and fantasies are given tangible incarnation. It is in such instances, moreover, that we may become aware of fantasy as something far more pro-

found than sheer escapism: namely, as a reflection upon, and imaginative extension of, cultural and philosophical preoccupations that are very real indeed. The intersection of cinema and architecture is a phenomenon that partakes at once of actuality and fantasy, reality and virtuality. Indeed, as Anthony Vidler has observed, while architecture is a "fundamental site of film practice, the indispensable real and ideal matrix of the filmic imaginary," film is, in turn, a unique "art of space" evolving from a visionary "fusion of space and time" (Vidler 1999, p. 14).[4]

9

Studio Ghibli, 1990–1991

Like the Clouds, Like the Wind (*Kumo no you ni Kaze no you ni*, or *Kumokaze* for short)—a TV film directed by Hisayuki Toriumi and produced not by Ghibli but by Studio Pierrot, yet involving in the capacities of animation director and character designer the Ghibli member Katsuya Kondou—was aired on March 21, 1990. Kondou, who has also worked as character designer on Miyazaki's *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989) and on the non–Ghibli feature *The Aurora* (2000), and as animation director on *Kiki*, on Takahata's *Only Yesterday* (1991), on the Ghibli TV film *Ocean Waves* (1993) directed by Tomomi Mochizuki and on Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), adopts a style so akin to Miyazaki's own that *Kumokaze* has frequently been mistaken for a Miyazaki production.

The film, based on a novel by Ken'ichi Sakemi, is set in ancient China at a time of social unrest triggered by the death of the 17th Sokan Emperor. As his son prepares to ascend the throne, an appropriate Empress must be found. Throngs of girls hopefully converge onto the Forbidden City, competing for the opportunity to obtain the enviable position. Among them is Giga, a homely but forthright country girl, who is at first solely concerned with the guarantee of regular meals and a warm bed but soon becomes entangled in an intricate web of personal antagonisms and large-scale political intrigue. An engaging historical drama,[1] *Like the Clouds, Like the Wind* proves most absorbing at the levels of both the graphics and the narrative complications in its ability to literally draw the audience into the heroine's daily existence as she gradually adjusts to palace life and carries out the tasks on the basis of which her suitability as the next Empress will be decided.

Although the film is not a Ghibli production, its approach to storytelling, its backgrounds and its character designs exhibit striking similarities with those of the studio's most popular features. The protagonist herself evinces remarkable physiognomic affinities with the heroine of *Kiki's Delivery Service*—not surprisingly, in a sense, given Kondou's aforementioned involvement in the 1989 Miyazaki film. Indeed, although some of Giga's exuberantly tooth-revealing laughs are vividly reminiscent of the animation style of *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kumokaze*'s overall aesthetic is unmistakably indebted to *Kiki*. This is attested to not only by the protagonist's general mien but also by individual frames—for example, in expressions of surprise at unexpected sights or revelations, of satisfac-

tion at the accomplishment of a challenging goal, of curiosity in the face of the unknown, and of bored frustration at times of inactivity and stagnation: one frame in which Giga stoops over a railing cradling her head is almost identical to the image of Kiki slumped over the bakery's counter at a time when business is slack.

Like Kiki, moreover, Giga is not only young and cute in a genuine *shoujo* fashion but also plucky and resourceful in her determination to take her life in her hands. Also like her witchly predecessor, Giga needs to refine her skills and emotions if she is to develop an adequate sense of personal responsibility and autonomy. In particular, as conspiracies and rebellions proliferate both within the palace and across the land, she must learn that belonging to an Emperor's harem involves acquiring a shrewd understanding of often harsh realities and that she cannot, therefore, hope merely to pursue the fantasy of material comfort. Just as Miyazaki's female characters are never depicted as conventional *shoujo* types but are actually endowed with a realistic sense of multidimensionality by consistent allusions to their intrinsic ambiguities, so Giga is not univocally portrayed as competent and clever but also shown to harbor a rather unsavory propensity for self-interest, as well as a generous dose of indolence.

What may come as a (potentially refreshing) surprise for some *animé* fans upon watching *Kumokaze* for the first time is the fact that its characters actually look Chinese. Concomitantly, the architecture and furnishings, the landscapes and atmospheric effects, the costumes and the myriad accessories are likewise distinctively Oriental. The soundtrack, too, contributes to the film's deliberately Eastern flavor by incorporating traditional acoustic elements such as clashing cymbals and whining flutes.

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Takahata's second Studio Ghibli feature, *Only Yesterday* (*Omohide Poro Poro*, 1991),[2] is based on a *manga* by Hotaru Okamoto and Yuuko Tone, and records the experiences of 27 year old Tokyo office worker Taeko Okajima in the course of a vacation to the countryside, which reactivates her memories of life as a schoolgirl in the 1960s so vividly that she comes to be palpably accompanied by her younger self.[3] As the present is intercut simultaneously by nostalgic flashbacks and a discreet romance plot, the protagonist increasingly recognizes the legacy of childhood, and gradually acknowledges the paradoxically momentous part played by seemingly small frustrations, minor disappointments and harmless quirks in the overall shaping of an individual's personality. These reflections ultimately prompt Taeko to embark on a lucid assessment of her future and to confront the ineluctability of some thorny decisions.

Above all, the main character's emotional trajectory is incrementally shaped by the realization that much as she longs to "let go of that baggage from the past" — namely her childhood and the feelings of inadequacy bequeathed upon her by its experiences — she will not be able to do so as long as she is haunted by the intimation that at an age when she should have started discovering herself and exploring opportunities for self-development, she actually "slept" on, allowing life to drift by. Even the initial sense of freedom experienced upon her entry into the world of work was fatuous: "it was like we [girls] had found our wings but looking back now maybe we were just flexing them pointlessly."

The ending signals a newly found determination not to let further chances for growth and maturation slip by unheeded. Importantly, on the symbolic plane, it is the less disillusioned infantile self that prompts Taeko to make radical choices. It should be noted, where the ending is concerned, that insofar as the protagonist's decision not to return to the city after all does not take place in the main body of the film but under the closing credits, it is not a definitive and unequivocal conclusion but rather a possibility offered by Takahata as an alternative to the closing sequence of the movie proper, or indeed as a parallel version of Taeko's course of action. If this were the case, it could be argued that the movie's happy ending does not consist so much of the protagonist's decision to follow her heart and embrace a rural lifestyle as of her acceptance of a hitherto debilitating burden.

In technical terms, Taeko's development is evoked by recourse to a subtle handling of facial expressions that bears witness to the powers of *animé* when its visual codes and conventions are deployed most imaginatively. This is especially evident in the young version of the protagonist: in the absence of a "real" mouth — with the memorable exception of the scene in which Taeko stoically chews and swallows several portions of sour pineapple, having insisted on its purchase — the eyes take on full responsibility for the conveyance of an astonishing range of expressions, and corresponding variety of feelings, often achieved by means of minute adjustments of the lash lines and of the pupil's highlights. Each vignette-like flashback providing insights into the central character's childhood acquires a distinctive mood precisely by virtue of a proficient use of facial effects that encapsulate the girl's responses to her circumstances — from the sense of frustration induced by her inability to divide fractions by fractions, through the elation resulting from the experience of first love, to the anguish following her father's peremptory prohibition of her involvement in acting.

While delineating an individual's emotional curve, the movie sensitively captures many aspects of Japanese life in both the past and the present, supplying revealing insights into family dynamics, social rituals, deeply ingrained customs, and attitudes spawned by the twin influences of modernity and Western styles. The instances of cultural specificity offered by *Only Yesterday* are numerous and varied. There are allusions to 1966 Japan, its assimilation of Western fashions and its approach to Beatlemania, as well as to the cult of baseball and to the mythologization of stardom. The representation of familial relationships is also context-specific in its apportioning of clear-cut roles and responsibilities to the aloof figure of the male breadwinner and to the ambiguous figure of a simultaneously dominant mother and submissive wife.

Also worthy of notice is the film's handling of the topic of menstruation: reflecting widespread attitudes in its emphasis on the admixture of curiosity and fear, pride and shame, acceptance and abhorrence surrounding the issue of menstrual periods, *Only Yesterday* is nonetheless quite specifically Japanese in its frank treatment of a theme that several cultures have insistently regarded as taboo.[4] In traditional rural communities, it was customary to solemnize the inception of a girl's menstrual cycle by means of a symbolic meal consisting of rice and red beans.

The opening credits are displayed against an unadorned rectangle of what looks like coarsely woven, charcoal grey cloth — an image suggestive of simplicity and art-

lessness. These are traits that will pervade the production at the levels of both narrative and characterization, in contrast with exactingly and lusciously depicted settings endowed throughout with painterly tactility and texture. A paradigmatic example is supplied by the sequence in which a misty dawn progressively gives way to full daylight. The animation here exhibits a majestic sweep, especially in the rendition of the valley — with its cultivated plots, clusters of woodland and surrounding mountains — traversed by spear-like luminous beams of sunlight. At the same time, however, the animation remains totally committed to the depiction of the environment's tiniest details: individual petals, leaves and thorns, a buzzing bumble-bee, diminutive dew drops rolling down the safflower stalks, a white butterfly eagerly surveying the awakening fields. The scene's overpowering glory is reinforced by a touching detail: the farmers momentarily stop working to express their reverential appreciation of a spectacle that is repetitive and yet never quite the same.

Images of this kind would feasibly come across as stereotypically elegiac visions spawned by a city-bred mind were it not for the meticulousness with which they are realized on the technical plane, and for Taeko's own admission that there may be something phony about her enthusiastic approach to rustic existence. Moreover, it must be stressed that the countryside is not the sole focus of Studio Ghibli's devotion to details, for the urban and domestic settings themselves are no less painstakingly depicted — from the tableware in the school refectory and the child Taeko's ballerina figurine, to the vegetable stalls in the lantern-lit shopping district.

The evocation of rustic simplicity offered by the background to the opening credits is starkly contrasted with the urban environment that dominates the film's early sequences, with its skyscrapers and ultramodern office and apartment blocks. The opposition between the rural and the urban is sustained as the action unfolds and the protagonist remembers longing, aged just 10, for an opportunity to spend her summer vacation away from Tokyo, where her family had been entirely based for generations. The theme is further sustained by Taeko's journey to the rural area of Yamagata, where she will spend her holiday working in the safflower (*benibana*) fields, hoping to experience a closeness to the earth and a sense of purpose that her city-based existence denies. Intriguingly, when Taeko tells her boss that she is taking time off, he asks whether the cause is her having "lost her love." In fact, she is journeying to Yamagata for the opposite reason: namely, to try and find a love she has always hopefully harbored as a possibility but has never been in a position to explore and bring to fruition. Through Taeko's experience, Takahata thus intimates that urban postmodernity has not quite succeeded in engulfing space and time in their entirety: locations still exist wherein tradition and community retain a deep significance and city-dwellers, too, may be able to embrace those values as long as they are willing to renounce the monochromatic comforts and flattened histories of their artificial environments.

Takahata's and Miyazaki's socialist leanings find expression in poignant reflections about the iniquity of the system underpinning the production of rouge dye from safflower petals in the past — a procedure which the film documents painstakingly on the basis of the data supplied by both fieldwork and thorough historical research. (Con-

currently, Toshio, a young farmer adamantly committed to organic cultivation, reflects bitterly upon the notion that Japan's agricultural economy may be facing irrevocable collapse.) At one point, Taeko refers to the harrowing story that attributed the redness of the dye to the fact that the girls responsible for picking safflower petals in bygone days wore no gloves, got severely pricked by the plants' vicious thorns and thus inadvertently contributed their own blood to the produce. Elsewhere, the protagonist remarks that the "rouge was literally worth its weight in gold" for the old merchants.[5]

Only Yesterday fully corroborates the proposition that Japanese animation is pointedly not intended only for kids. The most salient feature of Takahata's style in this production is his ability to convey a marked impression of realism through his chosen medium: if *Grave of the Fireflies* is redolent of Italian neorealism, *Only Yesterday* is definitely more akin to an Ozu film due to its emphasis on a contemplative disposition on both the director's and the protagonist's part. To an American spectator used to conceiving of animation as a fundamentally infantile form, the characters and situations presented in the film would probably appear blandly prosaic, and the absence of antics and action-packed sequences as unexcitingly tame. Yet Taeko's solitary journey does appeal to a wide public, and hence buttresses Studio Ghibli's unflinching determination to demonstrate the appropriateness of animation to the dramatization of themes that are neither childish nor particularly funny or spectacular. As Mark Schilling has observed:

> Given the filmmakers' obsession with the actual, it may seem strange that they use animation at all. Why not film real rocks, trees and people, and save the labor of drawing them? The answer, I think, is that Miyazaki and Takahata ... see animation as a valid medium for subjects once reserved for film. They want their art to take its rightful place at the grownups' table [Schilling 1991].

Only Yesterday is a fundamentally meditative and reflective experience wherein action is deliberately marginalized or at least tempered, and, in this respect, constitutes a paradigmatic instance of Studio Ghibli's aesthetic mission at its most intimate, personal and mellow. Though intentionally avoiding the epic tenor of productions such as *Laputa* and *Mononoke*, the film nonetheless offers a distinctively Ghibli-esque synthesis of impeccable cinematography, storytelling and music in a spellbinding and dreamlike symphony. Furthermore, the film's success paved the way for subsequent — also emphatically unheroical, yet hugely popular — productions such as Yoshifumi Kondou's *Whisper of the Heart*.

10

Porco Rosso

Porco Rosso's production started just as *Only Yesterday* was approaching completion, and since the efforts of the entire Ghibli staff were required in the final, typically hectic stages of producing Takahata's film, Miyazaki initially had to manage *Porco Rosso* single-handedly, taking full responsibility for disparate aspects of the project. *Porco Rosso* was released in 1992 and swiftly rose to the status of Japanese box-office hit of the year. Indeed, it remained the highest grossing animated film in Japan until the release and sensational success of *Princess Mononoke* in 1997. The film's performance took Miyazaki by surprise as he had expected it to be considered "too idiosyncratic for a toddlers-to-old-folks general audience." Furthermore, the movie's somewhat unorthodox genesis had contributed to produce mixed feelings as to its likely reception. The project had found inception with Studio Ghibli's commitment "to making a 45-minute film exclusively for screening on international flights." Miyazaki had, at that stage, assumed that the studio was getting involved in such a project purely "for laughs" but when he realized that "everyone else was thinking of it as a new movie," he concluded that he had no choice but take "their expectations seriously." The turning point in the venture was Toshio Suzuki's decision to turn the project into "a full-fledged movie" destined for "general theatrical release" (Miyazaki 1993).

Miyazaki had initially contemplated the possibility of making *Porco Rosso* as a "silly movie" with lots of fighting and slapstick sequences redolent of *Cagliostro*—partly in response to fans who had expressed the wish he would occasionally return to that style. However, the director rapidly realized that *Porco Rosso* could not be handled as a frivolous, light-hearted production for the simple reason that he no longer felt ethically or ideologically entitled to dramatize any form of action without simultaneously addressing the issue of motivation:

> Nowadays, we cannot avoid the question of "motivation" when we make a slapstick action film. For example, breaking down an entire huge building is a form of motivation. Such motivation is like the reaction to suppressed impulses, or an objection that leads to destruction ... the constraints of living in a suppressed society aside, I'm hoping to single out motivations for dreams, desires, and hopes.... A film without these motivations becomes a mere fisticuff fest [Miyazaki 1989].

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A subtle mix of cartoonish humor, lyricism, vigorous animation and incisive political insights, *Porco Rosso* revolves around the character of Marco Paggot, named after an Italian animator with whom Miyazaki had worked in the early 1980s. A former air force pilot, Marco has been turned into a reclusive pig by his brutalizing exposure to the horrors of the First World War, including the ghastly deaths met in combat by many of his comrades, which the film commemorates in the dreamlike sequence wherein a galaxy of spectral planes soars through the sky's placid immensity.[1] The flying ace's porcinity results from an implied sense of self-loathing engendered by the arguably illogical, yet overwhelming, conviction that he has not actually deserved to survive. At one point he indeed states: "the good ones are the ones who died. It could be life as a pig is the same as hell." Marco's isolation is underscored by his choice, as an apposite dwelling-place, of a secluded island in the Adriatic, his privacy guarded by forbiddingly perpendicular cliffs, whence he departs almost exclusively in order to succor the victims of a local brigade of air pirates.

It could be argued that Marco willingly embraces his bestial identity not only as a punishment commensurate with his unredeemable sense of guilt but also as an irreverently graphic indictment on the hypocritical values upheld by his culture in order to camouflage the actual tragedy of warfare. In this respect, the protagonist is essentially refusing to be glorified by recourse to the vacuously lofty label of "national hero." The director has indeed described the adoption of a porcine protagonist as something of a satirical accusation of the sense of self-righteousness that underpins so many modern and contemporary societies: "Pigs are creatures which might be loved, but they are never respected" insofar as "[t]hey're synonymous with greed, obesity, debauchery." Self-righteousness, in Miyazaki's worldview, plagues the most diverse political regimes, organizations and movements and could ultimately be regarded as the most ubiquitous and devious means of disciplining entire populations. According to the director, "the U.S.," "Islam," "China," "this or that ethnic group," "Greenpeace"—among countless other available examples including his own native culture—are brought together by a shared objective:

> they all try to coerce others into complying with their own standards.... I myself have a number of things I believe are right. And some things make me angry. Actually, I'm a person who gets angry a lot more easily than most people, but I always try to start from the assumption that human beings are foolish. I'm disgusted by the notion that man is the ultimate being, chosen by God.... I made the hero a pig because that was what best suited these feelings of mine [Miyazaki 1993].

It is also noteworthy that from a Buddhist perspective, the pig symbolizes human imperfection and hence alludes to a creature's regression to an inferior form of life in the cycle of reincarnations. Yet, Miyazaki likes pigs, often depicts himself—half-humorously, half self-deprecatingly—in porcine guise and indeed carries the nickname *Buta-Ya* (*buta* = "pig"). Marco, in turn, is sympathetically portrayed and whereas the director had ini-

tially intended to present him as an old pig with lecherous schemes on Fio, in the actual film, the protagonist is seen to withdraw courteously and selflessly from the young girl's affectionate advances.

Marco's porcine appearance also plays a central role in establishing the blueprint on the basis of which the movie's female characters are represented. As in previous (and indeed subsequent) Miyazaki productions, attention is drawn to the motif of feminine duality, with the chanteuse and hotel manager Gina signifying experience and the schoolgirl-mechanic Fio signifying innocence. However, being typically ill-disposed towards simplistic binary oppositions, Miyazaki underscores Gina's emotional vulnerability, on the one hand, and Fio's skills, on the other. Indeed, the younger woman is responsible for reconstructing Marco's plane after he has been shot out of the sky by the story's real swine — namely, the American movie actor Donald Curtis. Though tomboyishly cute, Fio is a mature, industrious and utterly dependable young woman, who turns out to be not only an exceptionally gifted designer, mechanic and engineer but also a dauntless defender of justice and honor. This is fully borne out by the sequence in which she is able to steer decisively the course of events by appealing to the pirates' own ethics with passionate yet lucid eloquence, reminding them that their ilk are held to be "the most honorable people ... because both the ocean and the sky washed their hearts" and to care, ultimately, for "neither money nor women" but for "honor." On this basis, Mamma Aiuto and his companions are enjoined to shelve personal interests and respect Marco's right to defend his own honor by engaging in one-to-one combat with the devious Curtis.

The contrast between Gina and Fio is highlighted precisely by their conflicting responses to Marco's mien. Gina yearns to regain the man that her lover was (or at least appeared to be) prior to the war: "I wonder what it's going to take to remove that mysterious spell from you," she wistfully reflects at one point. Fio, on the other hand, is actually capable of perceiving the man-behind-the-pig — as attested to by a superbly animated sequence in which the girl is half-asleep and sees Marco's face as human — and her attachment to him accordingly transcends surface appearances: "I'm glad you came back [from the war] and that I'm here with you now," she resolutely tells Marco in response to his speculation that a porcine existence is possibly the equivalent of damnation. As is characteristically the case with Miyazaki's films, the narrative refuses to univocally celebrate one pole to the discredit of the other: both experience and innocence ultimately have a part to play, and the relationship that gradually develops between Gina and Fio bears witness precisely to the importance of solidarity and collaboration.

Although much of the narrative is devoted to the amorous triangle involving Marco, Gina and Donald Curtis, the production could hardly be regarded as a conventional romantic tale. In fact, the troubling mystery of Marco's metamorphosis and its origin in one of the most sinister and gruesome chapters of European history overshadow the entire action — even though *Porco Rosso* is arguably one of Miyazaki's most overtly jocular works. Above all, the film eloquently demonstrates that the director may be fond of Italy and of Italian planes and cars but certainly not of Fascism. Moreover, while the movie faithfully mirrors the historically documented tendency among young aviators of the 1920s

to entertain a romanticized view of flying adventures over the Adriatic Sea and the Balkans as promises of unbounded freedom, it does not actually pander to this specious and ultimately dangerous illusion — a dream sustained by the relative safety of peacetime to be pulverized in the not-too-distant future by another earth-shattering conflict.

The film's historical setting coincides with the rise of Fascism in Italy. Pivotal to the new regime's strategies is the annihilation of any actual or potential opponent by means of obdurate intellectual repression and abominable shows of physical ferocity. The government hates Marco because he encapsulates the independence of spirit and action and scornful disregard for conventions which they so profoundly abhor and will stop at nothing in order to eradicate. The film abounds with references to anti–Fascist imagery and politics: the term "porco" is a typically Fascist insult, and Marco himself at one point bluntly declares, "I'd rather be a pig than a Fascist"; the "R" flaunted by Marco's plane may stand for "Repubblicano" and hence hint at its owner's anti-monarchic as well as anti–Fascist leanings; and the song performed by Gina, "*Le temps de cerises*," was the Communards' anthem.

Nevertheless, the guilt-plagued aviator himself is largely apathetic towards what he terms "humans' politics" — for example, upon being encouraged by his bank to invest funds into enterprises designed to help the state and the developing regime. As it happens, Marco would much rather make a living in the capacity of a mercenary flier and is willing to patrol the skies against the pirate menace but not in the interests of any established or burgeoning dispensation. The pirates, incidentally, are reminiscent of Ma Dola and her family from *Laputa* since, despite their utterly illegal objectives and exploits, they consistently put honorable conduct above everything else. Both Marco's and the pirates' ethical values echo the doctrine of *bushido* (the "way of the warrior"), a strict code originally associated with the samurai class

> that demanded loyalty, devotion, and honor to the death. Under *bushido*, if a samurai failed to uphold his honor he could regain it by committing *seppuku* (ritual suicide). Bushido is an internally-consistent ethical code. In its purest form, it demands of its practitioners that they look effectively backward at the present from the moment of their own death, as if they were already, in effect, dead.... There are seven virtues associated with *bushido*:
>
> - *Gi* Rectitude
> - *Yu* Courage
> - *Jin* Benevolence
> - *Rei* Respect
> - *Makoto* Honesty
> - *Meiyo* Honour
> - *Chugi* Loyalty
>
> ["*Bushido*"]

The *bushido* code has often been compared to the set of precepts meant to guide chivalric and honorable conduct among medieval knights.

Although *bushido* originated in samurai culture, it is still very much alive in contemporary Japanese society. Its legacy, as Patrick Drazen notes, is frequently reflected in *animé* though an emphasis on the notion of "heroic deeds": "Pop culture heroes range from chefs to surgeons, from investment bankers to hotel managers, from policemen

to bicycle messengers. The common thread in all these roles is to strive for perfection, to do one's best, to ... *ganbaru*" (Drazen 2003, pp. 111–112).[2] The key qualities required by present-day manifestations of *bushido* are "Perseverance," the "need to succeed and the recognition that success won't come easily.... Hence the cram schools[3] and the late nights at the office. Among the compensations is the belief that in their own way they [modern-day students and workers] are carrying on the heroic tradition of the past" (Drazen 2003, pp. 115–116).

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On the formal plane, a vital role is played by the opening and closing scenes of the movie, where attention is drawn to the enigma surrounding the protagonist's identity with notable visual dexterity. In the opening scene, his porcine countenance cannot at first be discerned since it is screened by an open copy of *Cinema* magazine[4] as he lies slumbering on his private beach with opera music playing in the background. In the closing scene, it is elliptically suggested that Donald Curtis has fleetingly perceived his face as human, but no incontrovertible confirmation is supplied for the veracity of this vision. Thus, the ultimately insoluble conundrum spawned by Marco's psychological, emotional and — of course — physical ambiguity is utilized as the structural motif that frames the film by discreetly but poignantly occupying its narrative boundaries.

On the graphic level, one of the film's most captivating elements consists of the representation and animation of the planes themselves. Several of these are deliberately made to look tentative and even slightly implausible but are not as dotty as the flying machines displayed in the opening of *Laputa* or indeed as Ma Dola's ship in the same film. In fact, they are based on real 1920s machines and on their relatively fluid design — an attribute resulting from the experimental character of aerial technology at the time. The sea-landing scenes exhibit a particularly energetic animation style, gaining considerably from what practitioners term the *exaggerated hit*. This effect is achieved by means of a series of drawings of the object heading towards collision that overlap slightly with one another so as to convey an intensified sense of speed. The last frame situated just before the full hit occurs shows the object making contact with the surface to be struck so as to heighten the severity of the impact. This last drawing is also elongated in order to add momentum to the climactic moments of the sequence.

Miyazaki's attraction to the kind of aircraft to be found in the 1992 movie is also attested to by his *manga* project *Hikotei Jidai* (1990), a title translated into English as either *The Age of the Flying Boat* or *The Age of Seaplanes*, on which *Porco Rosso* is loosely based. The *manga* is more light-hearted than the animated version: the protagonist's past is not explored (although the rise of Fascism is mentioned), the character of Gina is not included, and the fight between Marco and Donald (Chuck rather than Curtis in the comic book) has none of the filmic sequence's epic scope.

Porco Rosso evinces a deep fascination with mechanical objects of all sorts but it is by no means a *mecha* movie, Miyazaki's concern residing not so much with the use to which machines might be put for the purpose of furthering a filmic plot in purely fantastic or semi-realistic ways but with the form they are endowed with. What is more,

he is not so much interested in the shapes possessed by actual machines, which he could empirically observe and research, as he is in the shapes which he is capable of imagining and translating into drawings. To this effect, the director has stated:

> There was a triple-engine plane in Italy called the Savoia-Marchetti S.M.79 for which I've just happened to get a good diagram. So, I'm trying to recreate in my mind what the interior space of that plane must have been like. If I went to Italy, I could see the actual aeroplane in a museum, but I'd much rather piece together the interior of the plane in my mind ... if I were to see the real thing, I'd lose my motivation [Miyazaki 1993].

Miyazaki's visual discourse in matters of aviation is fundamentally aesthetic. Relatedly, while the film features a variety of Italian planes carefully reconstructed on the basis of real models, the director's favorite is the *fantastic* plane which, though named after the actual *Savoia S-21*, does not correspond to any existent machine but rather constitutes a synthesis of all the most striking traits to be found in planes from the 1920s which Miyazaki could care to collect — and, needless to say, he cared greatly.

The book *The Art of Porco Rosso* (1992) exhaustively documents Miyazaki's painstaking conception and design of a wide range of flying machines, some of which were actually translated into animated images and some of which served principally as background studies. The book also shows that the director's passion for airplanes and commitment to the rendition of their exteriors and interiors down to the minutest detail does not totally absorb his energy and attention to the detriment of other components of the setting. This is attested to by the sketches and concept art depicting the film's various interiors, where great care is devoted to the representation of the myriad images adorning their walls — from the Renaissance painting of a Madonna and Child hanging in Marco's haunt, to the oval mirror, photographs and film posters of the Hotel Adriano. At the same time, myriad accessories, weapons, tools, clothes, items of jewelry and tableware — to mention just a handful of examples — are portrayed with mesmerizing vividness, as are diverse substances ranging from polished wood, wrought iron and opulent drapery to humble bricks and stone. At the same time, a poignant contrast is consistently proposed between the cultivated elegance of the film's manicured gardens with their fountains, trellises and secluded gazebos, and the untamed natural environment with its vertiginously sheer cliffs and its protean skies and seascapes.

The animation's remarkable sweep and full-bodied feel for movement consistently evoke a sense of grandeur, particularly in the sequences that accord prominence to tides of restless clouds, billowing smoke, shifting shadows and bobbing waters. No less memorable is the movie's lovingly detailed rendition of the surprisingly wide range of patterns of motion of which the protagonist's open-cockpit hydroplane appears capable.

Porco Rosso evinces throughout a sensitive approach to acting, whereby each of the main characters is accorded an individual performing style and corresponding elements of body language, which graphically capture their specific mentalities, objectives, abilities and idiosyncrasies. This approach stems from the recognition that people act out roles dictated by their personalities and circumstances at all times, accordingly han-

dling particular sets of emotions and instincts. Body language plays a pivotal role in this film, as it consistently does in Miyazaki's work, and especially so in the animation of the more fully realized female figures — from Nausicaä and Kushana, through San and Lady Eboshi in *Mononoke*, to Chihiro, Yu-Baaba and Lin in *Spirited Away*, and Old Sophie in *Howl's Moving Castle*.

In *Porco Rosso*, it is through the animation of Gina and Fio, in particular, that Miyazaki most overtly illustrates the centrality of body action, and indeed its frequent tendency to predominate over dialogue as a filmic communicator. The simple adjustment of a hip, hand or shoulder can speak volumes in itself and enhance the import of facial expressions. This is borne out, for example, by the scene in which Gina describes her mixed feelings of frustration and regret at the loss all her former suitors and lovers to the sky. The merest gesture performed by this elegantly sensual and romantically disillusioned character serves to invest the story with a melancholy twist and a poignant strain of sentimental yearning. Body language is also effectively handled in preference to verbal discourse in the brief but narratively crucial scene centered on Fio as she stretches and looks out of the window at the budding daylight after spending the entire night at the drawing board, designing the protagonist's new flying machine. Among the most memorable representations of collective body language are the sequences showing the ranks of Piccolo women of all ages, shapes and dispositions neatly and purposefully parading into Master Piccolo's outfit, embarking on the construction of Marco's plane, and deftly transforming the workshop space into a cheerful dining hall at mealtimes.

Importantly, while the deft manipulation of details is instrumental to the evocation of a convincing and engaging acting style at the level of the central characters, it also plays a key role in the characterization of large crowds — of which there are several in *Porco Rosso*. In such cases, it would be preposterous to assume that each of the actors can be realistically individualized by means of a distinctive mode of performance. Hence, an alternative approach is used whereby the group itself, rather than its singular components, is treated as something of a composite actor comprising an astounding variety of types — elderly gentlemen, sailors, officers, wealthy businessmen, dandies, Fascists, busybodies, fashion-conscious ladies, toddlers, older kids — and a proportionately large repertoire of gestures, postures and attitudes.

The animation also exhibits a keen visual sensitivity to the historical and economic climate of the specific period in which it is set. This is especially evident in the representation of proto-industrial parts of northern Italy, where a profusion of bucolically calm sceneries simultaneously evokes a comfortingly peaceful mood and an alarming atmosphere of stagnation. The film is graphically reminiscent, in this respect, of *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* (*L'albero degli zoccoli*, dir. Ermanno Olmi, 1978), an elegiac recreation of the everyday lives of Lombardy peasants in which the tranquillity of the rural environment, though appealing in itself, also acts as an implicit reminder of the feelings of alienation and loss that pervade the world beyond those traditional communities. The mood of inertia hinted at by Miyazaki visually encapsulates the economic repercussions of the Depression, to which *Porco Rosso* makes explicit reference, and is

invested with special pathos by its implicit juxtaposition with the fight sequences that use an intentionally farcical tone and lavish chromatic palettes. It is against the backdrop supplied by the melancholy stillness of the surrounding countryside that the Piccolo women, with their indomitable optimism, vitality and exuberant creativeness, shine forth in their full glory.

11

Studio Ghibli, 1992–1994

In November 1992, two TV spots directed by Miyazaki were broadcast by NTV (Nippon Television Network). One of them, entitled *Sora Iro no Tane*—a phrase translatable as *The Sky-Colored Seed* or, more loosely, as *The Sky-Blue Seed*—was commissioned by NTV to celebrate its 40th anniversary and is 90-seconds long. Based on a very popular illustrated story—or "artbook story" (*e hon*)—for children by Reiko Nakagawa and Yuriko Omura, it recounts the adventure of a boy who plants a seed given him by a fox in exchange for a toy plane. (Flying machines are never left out of Miyazaki's visual repertoire, if at all possible.) The seed germinates into a large house populated by a variety of creatures all intent on having a good time. When the fox realizes that the barter has not benefited him as much as it has the boy, he sulkily undoes the deal, returns the plane and appropriates the mansion. However, the illusion dissipates and the beast ends up losing everything.

With its exquisite simplicity and gentle stylization, this spot reveals the influence upon Miyazaki of the art of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and specifically of his seminal tale *The Little Prince*. Complex expressions ranging from wonder through curiosity to eagerness—and many subtle modulations thereof—are conveyed with exceptional graphic economy, particularly in the frames showing the boy's and the fox's respective reactions to the objects involved in their barter, the boy's tending to the patch in which the magical seed has been sowed against a background of larger-than-life red and yellow tulips, and the proliferating human and non-human population of the house as this expands from a mere cubicle into a palatial structure. The main characters' contrasting dispositions are encapsulated by the image of the house itself. Indeed, the boy's ability to facilitate its growth and capacious attitude to its multifarious occupants points to a generous and open mind willing to accommodate variety and plurality, whereas the fox's one-track pursuit of self-advancement totally precludes any chances of productive interaction with other beings or with the environment at large.

Through discreet yet lively and colorful animation, Miyazaki here delivers a moral tale that succinctly exposes the destructive repercussions of any action motivated primarily by jealousy and greed. It is quite remarkable that the director should have managed to pack so many characteristic aspects of his pictorial and thematic registers in a mere minute-and-a-half worth of spectacle.

The other TV spot, aired as one 15-second and four 5-second elements, is entitled *Nandarou*, a word roughly equivalent to the English phrase "what is it?" As the title suggests, the spot is centered on an undefinable creature whose vague nature does not, however, prevent it from coming across as thoroughly endearing — sufficiently so, in fact, for NTV to decide to adopt the *Nandarou* as their mascot. (Note, incidentally, that the mascot of the 1996 Olympics was analogously called "Whazzit.") A detailed inspection of the green and cryptic beastie will reveal — which will perhaps not surprise most Miyazaki fans — a stylized porcine outline and the unmistakable corkscrew tail of the classic cartoon piggy.

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Tomomi Mochizuki is not a member of Studio Ghibli and is actually best known as the director of the *animé* features *Kimagure Orange Road* and *Maison Ikkoku* and of the *animé* OVA series *Here is Greenwood*. Mochizuki was invited by Ghibli to direct their first — and only, at least to date — TV film, because the studio wanted this project to involve principally their younger staff and therefore deemed it appropriate to appoint a director associated with the most recent generation of Japanese animation.[1]

The creation of gentle love stories is undoubtedly Mochizuki's trademark, and this reputation is fully sustained by *Ocean Waves* (1993), a movie that is also known as *I Can Hear the Sea*, which is the literal meaning of the Japanese phrase *Umi Ga Kikoeru*. A teenage romance, *Ocean Waves* pivots on the love triangle involving two close friends, the high-school students Taku and Matsuno, and Rikako, a girl who has recently moved from Tokyo to their native city, Kochi on the island of Shikoku. Rikako is initially regarded as a somewhat haughty type but actually turns out to be charming, academically and athletically talented and, above all, emotionally troubled by her parents' quarrelsome divorce.[2]

The film offers a touching exploration of the conflict induced in the central characters by their unforeseen exposure to novel emotions and desires. As they gradually sense the hold of fresh feelings, longings and possibilities of sentimental attachment, their commitment to the principles of loyalty and selflessness, which genuine friendship ought to entail and which has thus far guided their interpersonal conduct, is ineluctably infringed upon by a disabling element of rivalry. In this respect, *Ocean Waves* reverberates with echoes of Miyazaki's own distinctive approach to the tangled skein of human relationships.

The character designs, settings and animation techniques may come across as less impressive, on the whole, than those adopted for major Ghibli productions. Yet, there can be no doubt as to their meticulously detailed execution and their scrupulous integration of real-life points of reference. For example, the representation of Kichijoji railway station is strictly based on the building's architectural correlative with its actual platforms, stairs and barriers. Additionally, simple images such as the discreet fluttering of a fallen leaf into a puddle or the unruffled surface of the ocean under a star-dotted sky effectively crystallize the characters' feelings by means of a visual poetry redolent of the traditional *haiku* form.

The characterization is also subtle in its simultaneous depiction of the central char-

acters' qualities and shortcomings. When they act altruistically, for example, they are nonetheless capable of causing resentment and possibly anguish, and when they act manipulatively or even downright aggressively, one can sense the sense of inadequacy and lack of self-confidence underlying their moves. Above all, the plot steers clear of cloying sentimentalism and maudlin indulgence in the emotional import of teenage yearnings, allowing for moments of pathos yet deliberately downplaying their emotional intensity. At times, Mochizuki debunks even more drastically any proclivity to wallow in corny melodrama by means of sardonic remarks, as in the scene where Taku remarks that "the whole thing was beginning to feel like a bad soap opera."

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Takahata's *Pom Poko* (1994) dramatizes the belligerent opposition mounted by a tribe of shape-shifting raccoons (*tanuki*)—an established fixture of Japanese folklore—to reckless suburban expansion in the Tama area,[3] with a dexterous admixture of the serious and the whimsical. Takahata drew inspiration from actual events, namely the massive development of suburban residential areas in 1960s Japan necessitated by severe housing shortage in the main metropolitan area—and the attendant bulldozing of vast tracks of land, the rechannelling of rivers into concrete courses and the mushrooming of apartment complexes and shopping malls—as well as the protests mounted by environmentally aware groups concerned with the fate of the indigenous inhabitants of the devastated woods and hills. Writing for *The Daily Yomiuri*, Kyoko Nakajima has observed:

> When director Isao Takahata discovered a bamboo grove in his neighborhood had mysteriously transformed into a flat vacant lot, he wondered where the sparrows that once inhabited the area would go. The bamboo grove, which was hidden behind the home of a large land owner, was cut down as part of large-scale development. Takahata began to think about where animals and other life went when their habitats were destroyed due to construction of such things as golf courses and new towns. From these ponderings emerged *Heisei Tanuki-Gassen Pon Poko*.... "The film is not so much fiction as a documentary of the destiny of the raccoon dogs as seen through their own eyes," Takahata told *The Yomiuri Shimbun* [Nakajima 1994].[4]

The opening sequences indicate that the raccoons were an initially peaceful and laid-back species, incrementally rendered combative and territorial by human interference with their environment. A battle engaging the "Red" and "Blue" factions highlights the animals' growing penchant for aggressiveness while retaining an element of carnivalesque playfulness. At the same time, though farcical and deliberately cartoonish, the sequence never quite allows us to lose sight of the gravity of the *tanuki*'s predicament by emphasizing the ominous presence of demolition and deforestation machinery as a far more menacing blot on the landscape than the animals' own indulgence in military antics. As the wise and authoritative Granny Oroku urges the warring clans to quit fighting each other and take stock of the habitat's rampant depletion, the *tanuki* agree to unite in the service of a common cause: protecting their future by first of all endeavoring to understand exactly why humans are treating the environment in the way they are.

This requires them to study humans and to revamp, to this effect, the ancient art of morphing — a talent immortalized by numerous painters and writers of past epochs but allowed to fall into neglect once its conspicuous use started making the raccoons the target of human envy and vindictiveness. The process of studying humans, though clearly governed by serious objectives, allows for plenty of comedy — especially, in the scenes where the *tanuki* indulge in their inveterate proclivity for gluttony and indolence by avidly consuming gargantuan amounts of McDonald's hamburgers and watching television for hours on end, as well as in the sequences where the least skilled specimens' attempts at self-transformation result in grotesque human-raccoon hybrids.

Despite their common aims, the *tanuki* soon find themselves divided within their own ranks, and feasible strategies for dealing effectively with the invaders in a unified and unanimous fashion are eroded by tension and discord. While some raccoons aim for as nonviolent a confrontation as possible, the extremist factions are determined to drive the humans out by the most drastic and brutal means at their disposal. These radical members of the *tanuki* community are temporarily reined in by their partiality to food that would become totally unavailable if no humans were spared. From an ethical perspective, this constitutes an especially interesting strand of *Pom Poko*'s overall narrative. In attributing the more zealous raccoons' avoidance of the untempered ferocity of which they are no doubt capable to gluttony rather than to some lofty notion of tolerance or clemency, Takahata steers clear of moralistic idealizations of the type often found, regrettably, in Disney-based Western animation.

Just as the animals are not portrayed as univocally righteous, neither are the humans posited as incontrovertibly blind to their own folly. In fact, as the raccoons' raids on the construction site lead to what the developers think of as accidents, some begin to suspect that the place may be the epicenter of an escalating curse unleashed by the guardian gods and spirits of the land they have so unceremoniously violated. The *tanuki* use these suspicions to their own maximum advantage in order to sabotage the construction projects by using their skills to evoke potent illusions meant to awe the humans into submitting to the local spirits and deities. To scare the humans, the animals impersonate Jizo statues, a wailing sacred fox (*Inari-san*), dancing flames, animated hanging lanterns, extraterrestrial gremlins and faceless apparitions, while also filling the woods with eerily disembodied voices, in images that manage to provide, in the process, some of the film's most memorable and entertaining sequences.

However, the endangered species is again forced to contemplate the use of violence as it becomes clear that the damage inflicted upon the environment by the developers based in their area has spread far across the country. Indeed, the mass of earth removed to make room for the Tama Hills residential development turns out to have further plagued a separate *tanuki* community based in Fujino by being spilled into their habitat and by thus causing lethal landslides and water pollution. As one of the raccoons sadly observes, humans just "dig up one mountain and dump it on another."

While the environmental motif makes the film's sociopolitical relevance universal, it should also be noted that both the plot and the visuals insistently hark back to specifically Japanese songs, ritual dances, references to lore, mythology, religion and

art, as well as to related animistic beliefs. Some of the imagery may therefore strike the average Western viewer as outlandish and even obscene. This is how some prudish spectators, especially among parents who took their children to see the film in the expectation of standard family fare, reacted to the many images of ghouls, ogres and demons (drawn from ghost stories and Kabuki theatre) conjured by the *tanuki*'s magical antics, and — more vociferously — to the representation of the *tanuki* as creatures equipped with conspicuous testicles which they can enlarge and deploy as weapons.

A germane element that should also be situated in its particular cultural context, in this regard, consists of the film's use of explicit references to sexuality in the scenes showing the male raccoons' lovesick advances and the females' vehement rejection thereof, in keeping with Granny Oroku's injunction to curb the growth of the *tanuki* population so as to prevent the overcrowding of the already attenuated environment. The sexual imagery deployed in these blatantly comical scenes is echoed by the gentler and more poetical allusions to reproduction presented in the eminently bucolic springtime sequence showing the wooing and mating rituals of small birds, butterflies and ladybirds in a setting that fully testifies to Takahata's sensitivity to the natural environment's minutest riches. Both sets of images point to a frank acknowledgment of sexuality that could be regarded as specifically Japanese.[5]

A year-long chastity leads, in the second part of the film, to some entertaining sequences showing dalliances and amorous rivalries, passionate lovemaking and, inexorably, the growth of the *tanuki* population against their best interest. In an early amorous sequence, two members of the Tama community come uncomfortably close to resembling Care Bears but luckily, the impression is dissipated as they proceed to perform an especially nasty feat of haunting at the expense of a hapless bunch of construction workers. The scenes focusing on the cubs at play, for their part, are simply magnificent in their rendition of infantile body language without pandering to sentimentality or saccharine cuteness.

Takahata communicates the notion that the raccoons do not follow sheer instinct in their pursuit of revenge but are actually endowed with an emotional range and psychological complexity comparable to those of humans at their best. This is characteristically illustrated by a scene in which a family of *tanuki* shift repeatedly between animal and human shapes. The scene revolves around a male raccoon from the Tama region who has traveled to a distant town to seek the advice of a local sage over the issue of suburban development, fallen in love with his daughter and had three babies with her, while the sage and his associates protractedly debate the matter. In the scene, the Tama raccoon and his family anxiously discuss the painful possibility of separation once the husband/father is due to return to his homeland. In presenting the characters both as themselves and as loving, compassionate and attractive humans, this segment of the movie deepens our appreciation of the creatures' feelings and, by implication, of the magnitude of their ecological ordeal. For the sake of contextual specificity, however, it is also notable that the scene concurrently echoes the satirical tendency found in several legends to make fun of human stupidity by means of animal characters garbed in *kimonos*. At the same time, the scene anticipates the finale, where the surviving *tanuki*,

having lost the war, use their morphing powers to turn themselves into clothed humans and merge with human society.

Characteristically marked by Takahata's devotion to the capture of nature's moods through a detailed depiction of its minutest details in changing seasonal and atmospheric circumstances, *Pom Poko*'s animation also offers moments that are quite unique to this production. Particularly remarkable, in this respect, is the sequence documenting the unbridled construction activity conducive to the Tama Hills residential development, where a whole mountain is gradually and inexorably devoured and its green slopes are covered by proliferating clusters of edifices. This graphically condensed representation of the effects of suburban expansion is further emphasized by the following scene, in which a large leaf is methodically eaten away by a caterpillar-like bulldozer, and its wounds multiply until no trace of organic life is left.

A salient trait of the animation style used in *Pom Poko* is the alternation of two quite distinct configurations of the *tanuki* (regardless of additional metamorphic guises they may assume at any one time). In scenes where they are simply exploring their surroundings or gathering food, they are depicted as realistic animals with no individualizing markers or explicit hints at their supernatural powers — nor indeed at their communication skills and semiotic competence. Conversely, in scenes where they are seen discussing the logistics of their handling of humans, partying, playing or praying, they are highly individualized on the basis of somatic features, verbal styles, body language, personality traits, predilections and idiosyncrasies. In these scenes, the *tanuki* arguably exhibit some of the anthropomorphic elements to be found in many animal characters that appear in Western animation without, as mentioned, quite evoking a sense of entirely tame cuddliness.

The film's tempo is fast and engaging, especially in the slapstick comedy sequences, and pictorially heightened by bold colors and rich textures. In this respect, it bears full witness to Studio Ghibli's penchant for engaging the art of animation as a prismatic discourse wherein performance, timing, direction, and the seamless integration of images and themes must be consistently attended to as equally vital components of the creative process. One of the most memorable sequences for any Studio Ghibli fan is the *tanuki*'s parade through the city in disguises that hark back not only to Japanese lore but also, in a display of sumptuously choreographed self-parody, to characters from other Ghibli productions.

In the build-up to the parade, the Tama raccoons are trained by the Three Masters of Shikoku to maximize their morphing skills, thereby acquiring the ability to transform themselves into virtually anything from an enthralling dragon to a dainty bubble, from a fireball to a gigantic toad, from a cloud of vapor to a bunch of garden vegetables or a skeletal Pegasus. The swirling forms drifting towards the city before actually proceeding to invade not only its streets but also portions of its domestic interiors include an umbrella-equipped Totoro, an image of Kiki on her broom, a shot of Marco on his hydroplane (*Porco Rosso*) and an image of Taeko swimming through the air (as she does in *Only Yesterday* in the grip of a sentimental high). The actual parade opens with a figure riding a white wolf that anticipates *Mononoke*'s Moro, and later features a colossal spider remi-

niscent of *Totoro*'s Nekobus, as well as three bobbing heads and a giant infant that could be regarded as predecessors of the corresponding characters in *Spirited Away*, namely the Kashira and Baby. At the same time, the sequence is replete with motifs derived from traditional Japanese iconography: a fire-belching tiger, grotesque figures associated with Kabuki theatre and *matsuri* celebrations, demonic sword-fighters, hanging lanterns, octopuses, sacred foxes, *tsunami*, traditional musical instruments, and various forms of *bakemono* (monster) and *bakeneko* (monster cat).

When the humans hijack the parade, passing it off as a publicity event related to the inauguration of the Wonderland theme park, the raccoons are outraged and again exposed to the perils of internecine conflict. Throwing their remaining strength into a final attempt to save the forest, the more extremist members of the community embark on kamikaze attacks. Others, conversely, engage in what could be regarded as a parting ceremony, designed to pay one final homage to the lost habitat, by fuelling their metamorphic powers into a provisional restoration of its original appearance. In this scene, Takahata's distinctive use of nostalgia can be perceived, as the humbled and defeated animals envision their childhood selves in that imaginary resurrection of the old rural setting. However, the nostalgic element is counteracted by a pragmatic sense of the present, and of the survivors' inevitable capitulation to the insane logic of uncurbed metropolitan development.

The final sequence is somewhat ambiguous, for as it emphasizes both the exhaustingly repetitive existence that the *tanuki* who are able to morph into and live as humans have to endure and the persistence of a community of fun-loving and playful raccoons who somehow manage to not merely survive but also remain faithful to their nature and traditions. The closing scene, with its merry dance and morale-boosting song, conveys an optimistic mood and thus helps the film end on a positive note. However, we are not allowed to forget that this glimpse of a lost existence occurs in a nocturnal and possibly dreamlike or even hallucinatory margin of human society. It is quite obvious that the style of existence it celebrates is utterly obsolete and that *Pom Poko*'s actual ending consists of an unsentimental and pragmatic acceptance of the inevitability of the *tanuki*'s overthrow.[6]

The surviving specimens of their endangered breed have no doubt found ways of negotiating the hostile environment and even managed to obtain some material support from sympathetic humans, but this is about the full extent of what they may realistically hope to achieve. Moreover, this compromise constitutes the culmination of a lengthy plight saturated with acts of often extreme violence. The raccoons are indeed shot, run over, caught in vicious metal traps which they vainly struggle to bite their way out of: this is one of the entire film's most heart-wrenching images and is made no more palatable by the presentation of the trapped animal as a realistically depicted raccoon rather than as its obviously fictitious anthropomorphic counterpart. This stylistic decision on Takahata's part heightens our sense of the reality of the species' suffering without presuming to sublimate it by means of a cartoony transposition, which would feasibly serve to dilute both its actuality and its horror.

It is this aspect of *Pom Poko* that ultimately makes it a fundamentally "adult" animation, at least from a Western point of view. Although the raccoons have not been

unproblematically depicted as goodies, we have been invited to empathize with their predicament and to regard the situation from their perspective. Hence, in the tradition of "and-everybody-lived-happily-ever-after" animated movies, *Pom Poko* ought to climax with an at least partial victory for the animals if it were to fulfill Western expectations.

It could also be argued that while these facets of *Pom Poko* may make the film more adult in Western terms, in the context of Studio Ghibli's overall output, this generational label is not entirely accurate. Indeed, since 1986, the studio has been consistently producing films intended for both children and adults in which the themes of self-discovery and self-development play a key role, and the acceptance of loss (of innocence, of simplicity) is repeatedly posited as an ineluctable corollary of those processes. Furthermore, any gains brought by emotional and psychological growth — namely, by enculturement — must entail a humble recognition of the needs of others and of the importance, at times, of placing those over and above one's self-interest.

12

On Your Mark

On Your Mark is a music video lasting 6 minutes and 40 seconds, released theatrically in July 1995 in conjunction with Yoshifumi Kondou's *Whisper of the Heart*, that Miyazaki wrote and directed for the Japanese pop music duo Chage and Aska (upon whom, incidentally, the characters of the two cops central to the story are loosely based).[1] Despite its brevity and the fact that the story is told entirely by means of visual action and hence with no dialogue whatsoever, the video constitutes no less sophisticated an animation than any Studio Ghibli feature film at both the narrative and the technical levels. Indeed, Egan Loo has enthusiastically hailed it as "simply the most exquisitely animated seven minutes ever created. What began as a music video ... evolved into a 'Studio Ghibli experimental film'" that could ultimately be regarded as a highly refined distillation of "the sense of wonder so quintessential to Miyazaki's *anime*" (Loo 1996).

The narrative method adopted by Miyazaki is arguably one of the film's most intriguing attributes. Proposing subtle variations on a basic storyline, the video yields a multilayered, postmodern discourse that eschews any purely linear unfolding of events. It thus invites the audience to reflect on the symbolic and broadly cultural significance of the occurrences it dramatizes, and to extrapolate from those their own notion of what kind of story the animation might imply, instead of merely consuming the plot as a predetermined sequential process.

On Your Mark opens with a confrontation between the police and a bunch of religious fanatics, in the course of which two cops discover a winged being held prisoner by the sect and free her.[2] The officers and the creature they have liberated flee into the countryside — ostensibly contaminated by a Chernobyl-like nuclear accident — aboard an old yellow Alfa Romeo Spider. Here the angel spreads her wings and soars into the sky. The story is then reproposed with variations, as the action cuts back to the scene in which the policemen first found the creature. While they tend to her, this time, a special unit captures their charge and carries her off into the night. Beset by guilt at the thought that they have only delivered the being from one prison to another, the cops manage to infiltrate the high-security laboratory where she is being kept, and they free her. A breakneck chase ensues in which the trio race along a bridge suspended over an underground city, which eventually collapses causing the characters to plunge into

the abyss. The creature could have flown away from the wreckage but sacrifices herself in the attempt to rescue her saviours. A further permutation is next offered in which the two cops and their protégée survive the collapse of the bridge — as their vehicle conveniently sprouts rockets — and are taken to a block of flats. From here, they escape into the countryside — where the depleted environment now exhibits budding signs of regeneration. The officers lift the angel into the air, and she finally glides off into a glorious sunset.

The narrative structure elaborated by Miyazaki is consistently complicated throughout the animation by the inclusion of enigmatic elements, which may only be decoded in the most tentative and inconclusive of fashions, intended to stimulate the viewers' imaginations and encourage the creative proliferation of personal responses to the twin impact of image and sound. In an interview published in *Animage* shortly after the release of *On Your Mark*, the director himself stated: "I put in a lot of cryptic things, but since it's a music film, people can interpret it as they want."

In the same interview, Miyazaki suggested that a possible interpretation for the angelic being that figures so prominently in the film is "hope," and further proposed that to protect hope — which is what the two policemen endeavor to do in taking care of the creature and eventually enabling its flight — means, paradoxically perhaps, "to let it go where no-one can touch it" (Miyazaki 1995c). Hope cannot be regarded as a material possession: when one strives to capture it and cling to it, it ceases to be hope — it loses its original identity as a longing or a striving. Hope only retains its purity and authenticity when it is regarded not as a fixed object but as an ephemeral, evanescent and elusive entity to be continually refashioned and replenished. This ongoing process undoubtedly involves considerable exertion, forbearance and, very possibly, pain. Yet failure to engage in its rhythms is ultimately tantamount to denying the very feasibility of hope, let alone the viability of its visions ever coming to fruition. In support of his hypothesis, Miyazaki quotes the ending of the *manga* version of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, where the inseparability of freedom and suffering is vividly underscored: "We are birds, who fly again and again over that morning, coughing off blood."[3]

Like Studio Ghibli's main productions, *On Your Mark* offers not only a simple but tantalizing storyline and psychologically subtle characterization but also a thorough integration of harrowing concerns and discreetly humorous touches. Moreover, it uses computer graphics and digital compositing extensively, albeit unobtrusively and always in tandem with traditional cel animation, thus paving the way for the astonishing accomplishments in the field marked by *Princess Mononoke, Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle* in the years to follow. Above all, *On Your Mark* fully evinces Studio Ghibli's proverbial devotion to meticulously rendered detail. Indeed, as Charles McCarter has noted,

> the attention to detail is nothing short of incredible: from the police ship flying through the sky to the walls of the cult stronghold to the spinning wheel of the getaway vehicle. The empty coke cans on the floor by the imprisoned being, the stuffed animals on the cop's computer desk, and the menu signs and counters in the favourite restaurant of the two policemen are the details that really bring this world to life [McCarter 1995].

13

Whisper of the Heart

While Miyazaki produced the storyboards and screenplay for *Whisper of the Heart* (*Mimi wo Sumaseba*, 1995),[1] the film was actually directed by Yoshifumi Kondou, a member of Studio Ghibli whose association with Miyazaki and Takahata dated back to their days together at A-Pro Studios. Kondou had worked as animation director on the series *Anne of Green Gables* (part of *World Masterpiece Theatre*) and, at Ghibli, on *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989) and *Only Yesterday* (1991). He would also have been Miyazaki's most likely successor had he not tragically passed away in 1998 at the age of 47, victim of an aneurysm.

Based on the one-volume *manga* by Aoi Hiiragi, *Whisper* is both a sensitive exploration of teenage first love and a typically Miyazakian journey of self-discovery that partially anticipates *Spirited Away*. The film ranked among the top three films in Japan in the year of its release and was yet another Ghibli box-office hit, grossing well over $15 million.

The film's location (apart from the fantasy sequences discussed later in this chapter) is faithfully based on a residential suburb of Tokyo, Seiseki Sakuragaoka, which Kondou, Miyazaki and their team studied closely and recorded by means of innumerable photographs in order to recreate the mood of urban blandness and anonymity that is thematically pivotal to the story. In tenaciously pursuing this objective, they succeeded not only in creating a credible setting for an individual movie but also in evoking an exceptionally accurate portrayal of Japanese city life of a kind not seen elsewhere in *animé* or indeed in any other type of animation. Most importantly, the film stresses the vacuousness of traditional concepts of belonging via the heroine herself. Shizuku's own version of John Denver's song "Country Roads" (a big hit in Japan in the 1970s), which she is intent on translating for the school choir, is indeed entitled "Concrete Roads" and could be read as a direct indictment on callous urbanism: terms such as "home town" and "mountain momma" obviously have no meaning for someone who has led her entire life in a totally artificial environment.

Kondou's realistic rendition of the setting required him to include — and even, at times, to foreground — what would conventionally be considered unattractive fixtures of the urban scene, such as ubiquitous pylons and cables, as well as dull and flaking apartment blocks bearing witness to Japan's post-bubble recession, anonymous classrooms,

colorless train stations and supermarkets devoid of any historical or cultural specificity whatsoever. Nevertheless, *Whisper* has a unique and intriguing visual beauty of its own that does not depend exclusively on its undeniably luscious fantasy sequences but also, and no less importantly, on the animation's ability to make us perceive people and situations through the protagonist's eyes and in the light of her contingent emotions. Most memorable, in this respect, is Shizuku's first sight of the elegantly peaceful residential development nested at the top of the hill that she climbs in pursuit of an enigmatic feline "commuter."

This aesthetic and affective quality makes the movie both realistic and enthralling, weaving together in an unsentimental vein ennui and elation, disappointment and temerity. As Mark Schilling has pointed out, this quality of *Whisper* is consistently sustained by

> an accretion of small, vivid details, including the way [Shizuku] fumbles for the alarm clock and keeps forgetting her things. There are also moments, such as Shizuku's pensive walk down a shaded street, with the light and shadow playing on her slender form, that are poignant in their celebration of her youth, with all its promise, hope and uncertainty. A Disney film, forever running on to the next plot point, would usually spare little time for such seemingly extraneous details and moments [Schilling 1995].

Considering that *Whisper* does not aspire to the epic heights of a *Laputa* or a *Princess Mononoke* and that, unlike *Spirited Away* and *Howl*, is not pervaded by magic but only gently touched by it — notably, in the cat statuette's flair for changing poses in the course of the action — its impressive box-office performance may seem surprising. Yet both nonprofessional viewers and film critics like Schilling have often remarked on the movie's ability to draw the audience into its world with spellbinding effectiveness. This could be largely attributed to its very simplicity and knack of evoking a sense of wonder and bewitched intensity by recourse to ordinary, or only relatively peculiar, occurrences. For instance, though the discovery that the name of Seiji Amasawa appears in the checkout tab of every library book which Shizuku borrows is at first uncannily unnerving, a logical explanation for these only apparently coincidental encounters with a mysterious stranger is eventually provided. Thus, what invests the situation with dramatic tension is the heroine's emotionally charged — and latently mock heroic — perception of her circumstances as, in struggling to understand the world around her, she also endeavors to find herself in an inevitably haphazard and tentative fashion.

Another good example of *Whisper*'s ability to conjure up an enchanted atmosphere out of simple occurrences can be seen in Shizuku's encounter of the aforementioned stray cat on a train, and pursuit of the creature through unfamiliar parts of the town. This is not, in and of itself, an earth-shattering incident, yet the sequence derives a somewhat magical quality from the evocation of the protagonist's own sense of having embarked on a quest — which, as it happens, she has indeed done, though the object of her exploration will turn out to be not the destination of an enigmatic feline but her own creativity. The sequence also supplies a paradigmatic illustration of how *animé* at its most effective is capable of dispensing with dialogue in conveying complex emo-

tions. This feature of *animé* manifests itself again in a later sequence, where old Nishi is busy reading Shizuku's story while the heroine looks dreamily at the cityscape from the height of the house's outdoor gallery. The silence, only faintly disrupted by the distant noise of traffic, is so overwhelming as to acquire, paradoxically, a voice of its own and thus give voice, in turn, to Shizuku's anxious anticipation of her mentor's response. All the tension, apprehension and sheer fear experienced by the girl in the weeks leading to this climactic moment are superbly encapsulated by the film's handling of sound effects at this particular juncture.

Both of the sequences outlined in the preceding paragraph mark a distinctive treatment of space that is vividly reminiscent, in the representation of the relationship between height and depth, of *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*. The gradients of the Tama Hills are emphasized to the point that at times the landscape appears to stand up, so to speak, as open and flat stretches of the urban environment progressively give way to fundamentally vertical scenarios. Though realistic, the locations portrayed in these sequences constitute a fitting counterpart for the explicitly imaginary settings presented in the fantasy sequences, where conventional notions of perspective are irreverently flouted, nearby objects look preposterously small and distant ones alarmingly colossal, and the height of various edifices seems to decrease as one soars higher and higher towards their pinnacles.

Whisper contains three interconnected fantasy sequences:

1. The flight of a fictionalized version of Shizuku in the company of Baron, the magnificent figurine of a stylishly garbed cat owned by Nishi, which her imagination brings to life and endows with a life story. This takes place in the context of the imaginary land which Shizuku has created as the setting for a story intended to establish whether or not she has any literary talents.[2]
2. The views of the magic toyshop where Baron and his lost female companion were made and purchased.
3. The dream in which Shizuku explores a mine in search of the precious but unquarried stone supposed to symbolize her own promising, though as yet unrefined, creative abilities. Having seized what she thinks may be such a gem, she is horrified to discover that she is actually holding the carcass of a tiny bird.

The backgrounds for the fantasy sequences were painted by the artist Naohisa Inoue (b. 1948), an established Japanese painter who has been active and much admired in his native country for several decades. Central to his output are pictures of a simultaneously uncanny and engrossing world named Iblard (pronounced "e-ballade"). The aesthetics of this magical land are not only grounded in particular stylistic predilections but also shaped by an ethical take on the so-called real world which intimates that all forms are involved in a process of incessant and irreversible change. In Inoue's work generally — and in the images created specifically for Kondou's film in particular — this principle is visualized by recurring references to floating islands (named "laputas" in homage to Miyazaki), exquisitely sprawling forests, fractal and ivy-shrouded buildings of many shapes, shifting clusters of outlandish celestial bodies, deceptive mazes and

enchanted gardens, as well doors, staircases and arcades filled with unusual shops which the visitor is not allowed to leave, all of which are inclined to suddenly appear and disappear.[3] The attribute of ongoing metamorphosis that Inoue ascribes to Iblard is also, in his view, an underlying trait of the quotidian world, though most people are trained from an early age to perceive their contexts as stable. Experiencing images of Iblard — and becoming an *Iblarder*, so to speak — may, conversely, help us acknowledge those settings' protean fluidity.

As indicated in the introduction to the official website dedicated to Inoue and his work (English version), Miyazaki himself is "an Iblarder" insofar as he often speaks of a fresh way of observing the ordinary world, and a germane ability to "look through Iblard eyes" that is tantamount to rediscovering and celebrating the inherent instability of all things. The piece also explains the salient features of Inoue's world in a fashion that will plausibly remind some readers of Miyazaki's own art:

> Although some characteristics of Iblard can be explained, many elements also remain unanswered, even for Iblarders and Mr Inoue himself! Some of the most peculiar things happen in Iblard, many which just can't be accounted for. Just remember that Iblard is a mixture of the known and unknown, anything is possible in this curious world.... What is most important is that Iblarders respect one another's ideas, imagination, and concept of beauty, for certain Iblarders may have different dreams and stories than others. No one has the right to say what exactly exists in Iblard or not.... ["Iblard"].

Miyazaki asked Inoue to work with his and Kondou's team on the production of *Whisper* after visiting an exhibition to which he had been personally invited by the artist himself, and acquiring a picture entitled "Upward Draft" which now hangs in Studio Ghibli.

Miyazaki and Inoue's collaborative effort constitutes an incomparably felicitous encounter between two quite different yet subtly — even mysteriously — complementary art forms. This is thoroughly demonstrated by the collusion of Miyazaki's storyboards and Inoue's concept paintings, which the artbook *Baron no Kureta Monogatari no Monogatari*, translated as *The Story Baron Gave Me* (1995), exhaustively documents. Miyazaki's drawings are, as always, immensely evocative even in frames that contain the most minimalistic lines and color schemes. Inoue's paintings are also characteristic instances of his recurring stylistic and technical traits. The artist's distinctive painting methods are noteworthy in this respect. Like Miyazaki, he is reluctant to plan his works in advance: he starts by splashing acrylic paint of different colors onto the canvas, often randomly, proceeds to highlight different shapes which appear to stand out from the initially undifferentiated blotches and eventually draws, in several stages, the contours and details of individual objects and figures.

The artbook focuses closely on the three fantasy sequences mentioned earlier, tracing their development from the coalescence of Miyazaki's storyboards for the various scenes and Inoue's concepts, through the digital manipulation of those images, to the finished film, illustrated with reference to reproductions of series of frames as they appear in the animated footage. Importantly, *Whisper* marks the first full-fledged use

by Studio Ghibli of digital compositing, which had been adopted on a purely experimental basis in the production of *Pom Poko* a year earlier. Various elements — such as Shizuku's fictional characters, towers, floating islands, fragments of planets and banks of clouds, as well as images meant to evoke environmental and atmospheric effects — were animated independently by traditional means and then digitally integrated with one another in a seamless fashion. The flying sequences, in particular, comprised more than twenty layers, which gave them a 3D quality even as the two-dimensionality of the drawn and painted elements was allowed to retain prominence.[4]

It is also worth mentioning that *Whisper* includes a few visual allusions to other Studio Ghibli movies that may be seen as in-jokes on Miyazaki's and Kondou's part: a stuffed baby Totoro and a reproduction of *Kiki*'s Jiji feature among the toys on display in the dollmaker's workshop, and the evil cat presented in the flying sequence both flies a red plane reminiscent of Marco's machine in *Porco Rosso* and somatically resembles the illustrious pig. Furthermore, a Kiki-like witch on her broom can be seen hanging in Shizuku's room: importantly, this image is especially prominent in the scene where the heroine starts writing her story, which serves to underscore the crucial coming-of-age theme that *Whisper* shares with the 1989 production. Finally, the company responsible for the manufacture of the stunning clock seen in the antique shop is called Porco Rosso — quite fittingly, if one considers that the 1992 Miyazaki movie is, among other things, a story about unrequited love in much the same way as the tale underlying the artifact is.

The film does not provide a literal adaptation of the *manga* on which it is based but merely adopts its pivotal themes. Moreover, the movie departs from its source material in the addition of Shizuku's dreamlike journeys, the turning of Seiji from a painter into a violinist (presumably to bolster the "musical interest" dimension of the production) and its emphasis on the domestic tensions spawned by Shizuku's efforts at creative writing. This last element is handled with great sensitivity, and the heroine's parents, in particular, are depicted as flexible people who, while commending hard work, also comprehend their teenage daughter's inclination to follow her dreams despite the disillusionment this may engender. In a key scene, Shizuku's father[5] suggests to his wife: "Let's let her do what she wants. Not everyone has to be the same." Mrs Tsukishima, for her part, is well aware that it would be hypocritical of her to force Shizuku to bow to conventional expectations, given her own predilection for unorthodox choices and indeed ripostes: "I should know that if anyone does." Hence, the protagonist is encouraged to do what she believes in, though she is also provided with a cautionary lesson: "But it's not easy when you walk your own road. You've only got yourself to blame."

Thus, even though the heroine's academic performance is adversely affected by her foray into creative writing and her parents are understandably concerned, they give her credit for knowing what she needs to do without presuming to wield authority over her plans for self-discovery and, ideally, self-realization. No less importantly, they appreciate that whatever the nature of the private activity she might be engaged in, her total and unflinching commitment to is is undeniably commendable. (Indeed, it could be argued that Shizuku's prolific imagination, total dedication to her task and willingness to undertake thorough background research would seem to make her an ideal candi-

date as a prospective Studio Ghibli employee!) Shizuku's parents' liberal mentality is fully attested to by the fact that they do not require their daughter to attend "cram school."[6]

Ultimately, *Whisper* stands out as a candid commentary on the joys and the vicissitudes involved in by self-testing in the attempt to ascertain one's abilities, as well as on the awkward stumbling around that this inevitably involves, and on the likelihood that in the process feelings will be hurt, ambitions thwarted and potentially precious moments irretrievably lost. A partial consolation, in this regard, is the film's finale. This consists of a very unusual ending indeed by Miyazakian standards, for it offers, for once, a relatively neat conclusion in the form of Seiji's proposal. When asked whether he was prepared to admit that this was a bit too sudden, Miyazaki conceded that "[m]any thought so" but defended his position by stating: "I wanted to make a conclusion, a definite sense of ending. Too many young people now are afraid of commitment, and stay on moratorium forever. I wanted these two to just commit to something, not just 'well, we'll see what will happen'" ("*Whisper of the Heart* FAQ"). Of course, the finale is not an unproblematic case of living happily ever after since, given the central characters' ages and the magnitude of the trials they are still to confront, there is every chance that the closing promise may only be fulfilled after a considerable amount of time and experience have elapsed — if at all.

14

Princess Mononoke

In 1980 Miyazaki had formulated some preliminary thoughts on a story about a girl raised by wolves, but these were not, at the time, translated into an animation project. It was not until the success of *Whisper of the Heart* in 1995, and hence the availability of additional funds, that the idea was revisited. The production costs incurred by *Princess Mononoke* ultimately amounted to a record-breaking figure in the history not merely of Studio Ghibli but of Japanese animation overall, the acquisition of software and hardware for the creation of computer graphics having caused the expenses to soar to a total of $19.6 million.

While seeking to integrate new technologies into the conventional animation process, the production team was also deeply concerned with achieving maximum fidelity to the type of environment that Miyazaki aimed at portraying. To this effect, art directors Nizo Yamamoto,Naoya Tanaka, Yoji Takeshige, Satoshi Kuroga and Kazuo Oga explored thoroughly the mountain island of Yakushima, home to an exceptionally wide variety of arboreal species, as well as locales that allowed for the detailed observation of numerous light and water effects.

As Mark Schilling has emphasized, by the mid- to late 1990s, Studio Ghibli's films had become "dependable regulars in the upper ranks of the annual top-ten box-office charts." *Mononoke* was largely responsible for consolidating this trend by proving instantly successful among disparate sectors of the public and rapidly outdistancing "the previous record holder, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, at the Japanese box office following its July 12 opening. By the end of its first run in March, after an incredible eight months in theatres, *Princess Mononoke* had grossed more than $150 million in a country with one-half the U.S. population and less than one-tenth the number of screens." On the whole, the film attracted "one-tenth of the population to the theatres" (Schilling 1997, p. 3).

One of the principal reasons behind the film's tremendous popularity in its homeland is undoubtedly Japan's fascination with legend, mythology and folklore, and its population's ongoing devotion to the earliest collections of traditional tales. As Patrick Drazen maintains, "The compilation of written collections of folktales in Japan was a courtly pastime going as far back as the early twelfth century, and most of the major anthologies reprinted and read in Japan today date to between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries" (Drazen 2003, p. 39).

Mononoke was also the first Studio Ghibli production to receive substantial theatrical distribution in the U.S., even though it only played a minor role in the American box office — grossing about $3 million — due both to cultural prejudices surrounding *animé* in general and the prominence in the film of rather gory action sequences, which Western audiences would not customarily associate with the medium of animation. It should be noted, however, that even at the peak of its ferocity and brutality, *Mononoke*'s violence tends to be tempered by a quasi-parodic visual tone reminiscent of Monty Python and of the films of Quentin Tarantino.

What arguably makes *Mononoke* an adult film is not so much its explicit presentation of unpalatable moments of butchery as its confrontation of troubling existential issues. As the director himself has suggested, Ashitaka's curse, in particular, could be read as a metaphor for the absurdity "that is part of life itself" (Miyazaki 1997a) as it points to the individual's simultaneous obligation to two irreconcilable dimensions: in this case, the supernatural one wherein killing a spirit is a heinous and unpardonable crime, and the human one wherein a responsible person's duty is to protect others even at the cost of his or her freedom of choice. As Michael Lane has commented, "it seems, paradoxically, that a curse is wedded to life itself. There may have once been an age of lost innocence, but the way back is not the way we came. Our life may be spared, but not our tears" (Lane 2003b, p. 8).

This ethos is both thematically and pictorially sustained by the film's articulation of a poetics of weight that is consistently conveyed by its emphasis on the onerous commitments that tie the main characters to their respective worlds, and on the notion of destiny as an exacting burden, as well as the deliberate exclusion of Miyazaki's most characteristic and assiduously utilized means of evoking a sense of release, freedom or levity — flight. (*Mononoke* is indeed the only Studio Ghibli feature in which Miyazaki has played a major artistic role that does not include any flying sequences.)

Miyazaki has explained his inclusion of unprecedentedly dark elements in *Mononoke* as a corollary of his desire to address frankly and unsentimentally the younger members of the public:

> I think that if you are very genuine in doing films for young children, you must aim for their heads, not deciding for them what will be too much for them to handle.... What we found was that the children actually understood the movie [*Mononoke*] and what we were trying to say more than adults.... I wanted to be honest with the young audience, to tell them that human society is not fundamentally blessed.... I do this ... just to say that this is the world we all live in, children and adults, that we share this despair [quoted in Lyman 1999].

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Mononoke is set in the Muromachi period (1392–1573), a time of political and cultural instability, coinciding with the first deliberate attempts by humans to master nature rather than honor and appease it, that nevertheless saw the inception or perfection of many traditional arts, customs and institutions, such as the tea ceremony, Noh

theatre and Zen-inspired garden landscaping. However, the movie is patently not a period or costume drama. Miyazaki had no desire to tell yet another story about samurai, geishas and other conventional figures but sought instead to focus on oppressed and marginalized minorities and thus rectify the reductive interpretations of history popularized by myriad Japanese movies. As the director himself explains,

> Recent studies in history, anthropology, and archaeology tell us that Japan has a far richer and more diverse history than is commonly portrayed. The poverty of imagination in our period dramas is largely due to the influence of clichéd movie plots. The Japan of the Muromachi era ... was a world in which chaos and change were the norm.... It was a more fluid period, when there were no distinctions between peasants and samurai, when women were bolder and freer [Miyazaki 1997b, p. 20].

History, this approach suggests, should never be considered an unproblematic given. *Mononoke* effectively paints an alternative version of Japanese history to the one commonly promulgated by the many stories that unquestioningly celebrate the mythical notion of Japan as a homogeneous country, proposing instead a scenario of dissonance and strife populated by the sorts of characters that rarely — if at all — appear on the stage of history.

Above all, where setting is concerned, *Mononoke* is a lush tapestry woven in an age "when gods walked the earth," and what would eventually become Japan was still an assortment of warring tribes. In such times, "an epic battle wages between the encroaching civilization of man and the gods of the forest" (Miyazaki 1997a). The pivotal location is the god Shishigami's forest where San, a young girl abandoned by her parents and raised by the Wolf God Moro, guards the forest against the human foes who abuse the earth's resources to their own ends. Especially infamous, in this regard, are the ironworkers of Tataraba, responsible for polluting the farmland and for felling the forest's trees in order to obtain fuel for the huge bellows that keep the fire alive in their foundries. Invoking numerous historical documents pertaining to the film's period, Miyazaki also shows how these activities bring Tataraba's proto-industrial society into conflict with the traditionally agricultural samurai economy. Historical evidence was also drawn upon in the representation of the forest's inner *sanctum*, Shishigami's pond, for sites such as this are held by many historians, such as Kinya Abe and Yosihiko Amino, to have actually existed. These were holy places — notably secluded areas "where pure water is running in the depth of the forest in the deep mountains" — which, it was believed, "humans should not enter" (Miyazaki 1997a).

Although it is important to acknowledge the modicum of historical accuracy underpinning the film, it is also important to recognize the extent to which Miyazaki has here forged an essentially personal mythology, and a correspondingly imaginary pantheon of forgotten gods and spirits confined to the last extant pockets of inviolate nature. Thus, *Mononoke*'s magical and haunted settings are peopled by creatures that have only partial or peripheral counterparts in Japanese lore. For example, the Kodama do feature in traditional mythology as spirits of the dead but had never been represented prior to Miyazaki's film, while Didarabocchi is cited in a legend but in a completely different

guise, which suggests that the protean creature depicted in *Mononoke* is entirely the director's own creation. The most memorable of the spirits immortalized by the film, however, is indubitably the Deer God Shishigami. As Alessandro Bencivenni has observed, "with its double countenance, human eyes in an animal muzzle, and the ineffable and mysterious smile of Greek *kuroi*,[1] the Forest God appears to represent the supreme balance of Yin and Yang, death and rebirth, disrupted by men's blindness" (Bencivenni 2003, p. 129; my translation).[2]

In the logic of the story, San is "neither human nor wolf" but ultimately belongs to the forest rather than to the human world. It is to her and Shishigami's realm that fate brings young Ashitaka, a prince from a remote northern tribe long deemed extinct. When Prince Ashitaka's village is attacked by a Boar God, Ashitaka kills the creature saving his village but is wounded in the process. The god has been wounded by an iron ball produced by the ironworkers and has thus become a *tatari*— a curse. Marked by the bane that plagued the Boar God in the first place, the young prince faces an ineluctable and excruciatingly painful death. He must leave his village in the company of his faithful and wise steed — the fictionalized red elk Yakul — and seek out the source of the evil that now invades him and appears capable of corrupting the gods to the point that they will pursue humans to nefarious ends against both custom and reason. Having reached the forest, Ashitaka becomes involved in a legendary conflict between the gods and the humans who exploit the land for their betterment. San, who is full of hatred and resentment towards humans, finds it arduous to endorse Ashitaka's actions as benevolent and devoid of deceitful intentions. However, his determination to support her at the risk of his own life forges the beginning of a powerful bond, capable of bridging the gap between the two sides at war and inaugurating a more auspicious future.

Although San's and Ashitaka's worlds remain mutually incongruous to the end of the film and beyond, a propitious vista is nonetheless disclosed by their profession of steadfast commitment to each other beyond the dire necessity of physical separation. The director has commented as follows on *Mononoke*'s ending: "We are not trying to solve global problems with this film. There can be no happy ending to the war between the rampaging forest gods and humanity. But even in the midst of hatred and slaughter, there is still much to live for. Wonderful encounters and beautiful things still exist" (Miyazaki 1997b, p. 20).

If the story dramatized by *Mononoke* is multi-faceted and resistant to monolithic interpretations, the film's title is no less complex. As Drazen explains, "The suffix *-hime* means 'princess,' but the title character, San, rules over nothing; she lives alone in the forest with the spirit-wolves who raised her. *Mononoke* means 'evil spirits.' The film is half over before we see that *Mononoke-hime* is a derogatory nickname given to San by the people of Tataraba.... 'San' also means the number three, and the feral child was taken in as the third cub of the wolf-spirit Moro" (Drazen 2003, p. 137).

In *Mononoke* as elsewhere, one of the most potent aspects of Miyazaki's narrative style is his approach to character development, shunning stereotypes and endeavoring to evoke a vivid sense of multi-dimensionality. Lady Eboshi is a primary example of a

very strong and complex character in this story. Although she unscrupulously depletes the forest, she is also compassionate and offers shelter and work to both lepers and ex-prostitutes. Jiko, a priest acting on behalf of the Emperor, is also ambiguous: charitable and affable in his treatment of Ashitaka, he nonetheless has no qualms in talking Lady Eboshi into killing Shishigami and obtaining the god's head. The animal gods themselves, though often wiser than humans, are not univocally portrayed as positive forces. The boars, in particular, are dangerously stubborn despite their fortitude. While the Wolf God Moro conjures up a genuine sense of sorrow through statements such as "I sit here and listen to the pain of the forest," there is an unsavory trace of dogmatism in her refusal to even contemplate the possibility of peaceful coexistence with humans. She also comes across as somewhat callous when she tells Ashitaka, who is struggling to recover from his wound, that he could simply put an end to his suffering by jumping into the abyss below.

As Schilling observes, "the forest gods are not stainless heroes. Their long, losing conflict with humans has made them bitter and unforgiving toward their enemies, divided and contentious within their own ranks" (Schilling 1997, p. 4). Miyazaki has vividly underscored this idea by resisting "the usual animation ploy of drawing anything with four legs as rounder, softer, cuter than life. Moro is a wolfish wolf, Okkotonushi, a boarish boar, but with a strangeness and grandeur that are archaic, larger than life. Also, though they talk to each other and the humans around them, as have uncounted legions of animated animals from Mickey Mouse on down, they seem to be communicating through a form of telepathy, resulting in an almost hypnotic persuasiveness" (Schilling 1997, p.6).

The avoidance of stereotypical characterization was one of Miyazaki's priorities throughout the planning and actual realization of the film. It is for this reason that *Mononoke* does not really feature what one could in all faith call a bad guy. The director has commented as follows on this aspect of the film: "When you talk about plants, or an ecological system or forest, things are very easy if you decide that bad people ruined it. But that's not what humans have been doing. It's not bad people who are destroying forests.... Hard-working people have been doing it. During the Edo era, many beautiful forests were raised, but that was because trees were planted to finance a *Han* (feudal domain). So if someone cut even one branch off, they cut his arm or head off.... Because of such terrible power, the forests were born.... [Today] it is exactly the problem of the environmental destruction we are facing on a global scale. This is the complexity in the relationship between humans and nature. And since this is a big theme of this film, I didn't want it to be a story about a bad guy" (Miyazaki 1997a).

Mononoke treats complex ideological issues that would feasibly constitute appropriate subject-matter for a live-action drama. However, it does so not only with reference to cogently researched segments of Japanese history, and to meticulously reconstructed Japanese geography, but also by recourse to the supernatural, the legendary and the magical — and this is where the comparison between Miyazaki's 1997 movie and live-action cinema comes abruptly to an end. Indeed, a production utilizing actual people and places could never as effectively interweave serious political concerns and purely imaginary ele-

ments without somehow sacrificing either its realism or its fantastic dimension. To this extent, *Mononoke* serves as a powerful — and, in its category, quite unique — reminder of the powers inherent in animation, which no other form of cinema may mimic, let alone equal. Unfettered by the physical and logical rules to which the real world is bound and hence able to create spaces in which grave ordeals can be tackled at the same time as dreams and fictions can be given free rein, animation has the power to engender universes that cannot be classified as mirror images of the real but must actually be acknowledged as parallel levels of existence in their own right.

This is never more gloriously asserted, in *Mononoke*, than in the sequences focusing on the cyclical, yet incessantly new and overwhelming phenomena that mark nature's awakening or the alternation of light and darkness. Though often majestic, such images nonetheless yield room for more light-hearted, fanciful and even playful expressions of the fantastic, most memorably in the portrayal of the Kodama as both cute and uncanny. Thus, Miyazaki's film staunchly resists monochromatism in the depiction of the environment, in the understanding that its sublimity would lose vigor and the capacity to awe were it posited as a constant and unvaried attribute. At the same time, the prismatic character of the settings is paralleled by the variety of perspectives encompassed by multiple confrontations involving deities, animals and humans in their respective struggles to find viable places and roles in an emerging social order rife with unprecedented challenges.

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Mononoke contains several culturally specific moments which, when Neil Gaiman came to translate the film for the English dub, necessitated the occasional inclusion of additional lines intended to clarify the import of the visuals. One such case is the scene in which Ashitaka cuts off his topknot — an act which symbolizes, in the context of traditional Japan, his utter severance from his roots: from now on, the prince will be "dead" to the people of his native village. (Ashitaka's loss of his cultural identity after cutting off his hair and leaving home is graphically reinforced by the fact that he also covers his face almost completely, thus intimating that he has become something of a non-person.) As Gaiman explains, "In the Japanese [version], they are talking about other things, and he goes and cuts his hair, puts it on the altar, goes out, and never comes back to his village. As far as most Americans are concerned at this point, he's just given himself a haircut, possibly because it's going to be a slightly long trip" (quoted in Biodrowski 1999a). Hence, the script for the adaptation into English had to spell out the act's symbolic significance.

Drazen has also commented on Gaiman's translation of *Mononoke* with reference to the issue of cultural specificity and, in particular, to the context-bound character of perceptions and definitions of obscene language.

While in the Japanese script the monk Jiko at one point equates his soup to "hot water," in the English translation the comparison is to "donkey piss" (Drazen 2003, p. 35). This example succinctly testifies to the gulf separating Japanese and Anglo-American conceptions of what may be plausibly deemed offensive.[3]

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The exceptionally high number of cels produced for *Mononoke* (144,000, out of which approximately 80,000 were key animation cels) meant that its overall style of motion is substantially more fluid and realistic than one would expect of the average Japanese animation. Computer-generated imagery contributed significantly to this cumulative effect by communicating a sense of solidity and presence comparable to that achieved in live-action cinema. Ultimately, however, what is most distinctive about the film is Miyazaki's unfaltering commitment to the animation of its settings by recourse to an aesthetic that prioritizes the evocation of atmosphere. This is achieved through the consistent juxtaposition of pastoral landscapes and outbreaks of violence endowed with eminently visceral connotations, as well as through the use of recurring images — comparable to musical refrains — such as foliage rustling in the wind or light refracting on water.

At the same time, the animation benefits greatly from the director's refined sensitivity to the slightest nuances of animal movement. While the wolves, boars, apes and horses that appear in the movie are each endowed with characteristic and effective patterns of motion, it is in the animation of Yakul that Miyazaki's devotion to the convincing depiction not only of animal movement but also facial expressions delivers the most remarkable outcomes. As Steve Biodrowski points out, an especially memorable scene, in this respect, is the one in which the elk "goes paralyzed with fear at the sight of the monster [Tatarigami] — which would not be surprising in and of itself. What is surprising is that the look of the character immediately convinces us of Yakul's inherent nobility and courage. Somehow, you know this is not a creature easily frightened; therefore, to see it quivering in fear, unable to move to save itself, increases our own fear at the approaching threat" (Biodrowski 1999b).

When Studio Ghibli's CGI department was first established, in 1995, it consisted of no more than two staff members. By the time *Mononoke* was being produced, it had grown to include CGI director Yoshinori Sugano, who had already worked on the digital elements experimentally included in Takahata's *Pom Poko* (1994); the animators Yoshiyuki Momose, Mitsunori Kataama and Masashi Inoue; the digital paint artist Hiroaki Ishii; and a number of computer experts. Miyazaki's approach to digital technology in *Princess Mononoke* has been effectively summarized by Sugano:

> ordinary computer graphics animation produces images like the ones in *Toy Story*. But Mr. Miyazaki wanted computer graphics that could be seamlessly integrated into cel animation, so we had to begin by developing software that could do that. We asked Microsoft to develop software that could mimic the feel of thickly applied paint, sharp contour lines, and other characteristics of cel animation ... our goal was to make computer graphics images conform to the level of realism you find in cel animation.... We didn't want them to stand out in some odd way. At the same time, we wanted the kind of solidity and presence that is only possible with computer graphics [Sugano 1997, p. 176].

Beside relying on the software giant Microsoft, Studio Ghibli's CGI Department also used computers made by Silicon Graphics (a company with a solid reputation in the film industry), as well as software from Avid. What is most remarkable about the

use of CGI in *Mononoke* is that it never exhibits the dubious quality of an add-on but is fully synthesized into the overall action and is therefore able to contribute vitally to the evocation of a meticulously nuanced atmosphere wherein elements from diverse historical eras coalesce, and traditional motifs mesh with wholly fictional interpretations of the forces of both nature and technology.

Therefore, although Studio Ghibli used CGI extensively in the production of *Mononoke* (indeed, in more than one-hundred cuts), the overall animation — much like the story's historical and cultural dimensions — consists of a harmonious blend of the traditional and the novel. The film makes judicious use of CGI, ensuring that this complements the hand-drawn elements instead of overwhelming them, and that it is employed where it is most effective (e.g. in subtly moving backgrounds that can be more smoothly animated with computers). Thus, the overall style maintains an artistic, handcrafted feel even as it keeps up with the times.

Mononoke contains about 15 minutes of CGI. Of these, 10 minutes are filled by the scenes that used digital ink and paint only. The remaining five minutes employed various digital techniques, such as 3D rendering, morphing, particles, digital composition and texture mapping. Importantly, "a new CG room was set up at Ghibli for the production of *Mononoke-hime*. By the end of the production, Ghibli had two servers, 21 desktop client computers, and peripherals such as printers and scanners. The filming division also uses computers for filming and digital composition. Except for the film recording, which was done by the film laboratory IMAGICA, almost all CG-related work was done at Ghibli" ("Computer Graphics in *Princess Mononoke*— I"). The original intention was to paint digitally just 5,000 frames out of the movie's total of 144,000 frames of animation. However, due to shortage of time, an extra 5,000 frames were digitally painted, which brought the total amount of digital cels to 10% of the overall production. The main digital techniques employed in the movie are described below.

- **3D Rendering**— In the sequence in which the curse-maddened Boar God Tatarigami pursues Ashitaka and Yakul, the snake-like feelers that enfold the creature and eventually spread to Prince Ashitaka's arm were animated using 3D digital rendering. This technique first required the creation of a computer-generated 3D wiremesh model. The various configurations that the feelers would take when viewed from different perspectives and in changing lighting conditions had to be meticulously assessed. The model was then painted using *Toonshader*— shading software that modifies CG images so as to endow them with a more cel-like look. (*Toonshader* was developed collaboratively by Ghibli and Microsoft.) The "snakes" were then composited with the background and with a hand-animated Ashitaka. The scene where Tatarigami is finally hit by Ashitaka's arrow was entirely computer generated (arrow included). Digital animation played a key role throughout the production process in the rendition of the tentacles emanating repeatedly from the Prince's arm — most notably during struggles or at times of peril. The mix of full visibility and semi-transparency is quite remarkable.

According to Sugano, the integration of 3D digitally produced objects forming Tatarigami's snakelike mass of tendrils into cel animation was the "hardest assignment" that his department had to face precisely because, in keeping with Studio Ghibli's overarching ethos, it was vital to "retain a hand-drawn flavor in the final image." At the same time, however, the rewards yielded by the new technology were immense, especially in the rendition of "a feeling of depth or a sense of space" and of "a more realistic feeling of speed and three dimensionality" because it was now possible to construct digitally a 3D space and have "the camera seem to move inside it" (Sugano 1997, p. 176).

- **Morphing**— This term basically refers to special effects used to produce a smooth transformation from one object or shape to another. An image is scanned into the computer and digitally manipulated, sometimes by being combined with wholly virtual images, and then integrated into a piece of live-action footage. In *Mononoke*, this technique was used most effectively in the sequence displaying the dying and rapidly decomposing Tatarigami. Thanks to morphing, animators are not required to draw each intermediate stage of a sequence representing a dramatic transformation in a character or environment, as the software produces in-betweens by reshaping and overlapping the key pictures. Morphing technology was also employed in the sequence in which the depleted forest is regenerated at the end of the movie.
- **Particles**— Particle systems is a procedural animation technique designed to manipulate clusters of objects. For example, a bunch of points can be instructed to move like a cloud, a puff of smoke or a gush of steam. The stars punctuating Didarabocchi's body were computer-generated with the help of particle systems. Particles simulating the stars were incorporated in the creature's wiremesh 3D model, and thoroughly calculated with reference to environmental factors — such as gravity and the force of the wind — so as to establish accurately in which direction the particles should move. Finally, the particle-equipped digital model was composited with the hand-animated Didarabocchi. As Sugano has stressed, the principal advantage of particles for animators is that they "seem to move like living things" with high degrees of realism but are easier to manipulate than "a large number of massive 3D objects" because they "have only coordinates and no surface area" (Sugano 1997, p. 178).

  While offering a superb example of the utilization of particle systems, this creature can also be said to be pivotal to the most spectacular environmental effects used in *Princess Mononoke*— an astonishing range of variations on the most disparate qualities of light, water, air and vegetation evoking the sense that the forest is in the process of constant transformation. A four-legged, multi-antlered, furry creature known as Shishigami during the day, the Spirit of the Forest morphs into Didarabocchi (Nightwalker) when the light fades.
- **Digital Composition**— This is the process whereby separate elements (i.e. photographic images) are filmed, scanned into a computer and combined onto a

piece of film. "Compared to optical composition, digital composition can deal with complex movements and effects, since the technology makes it possible to compose many layers" ("Computer Graphics in *Princess Mononoke*— II"). For example, five layers were used in the scene showing Ashitaka and Yakul being pursued by Tatarigami: the background of sloping fields with the woods in the distance; the cel outlining the god's track through the grass; the cel of the god's actual body; the shadowed version of the god's body; the cel of Ashitaka and Yakul. The scene in which Lady Eboshi is shown standing calmly amidst the smoke and tumult caused by the charges of gunpowder laid against the boar spirits is also a product of multilayered composition. Each layer carefully isolates a distinct set of elements, from minute details such as sparks and wafts of smoke to fully rounded human figures.

- **Texture Mapping**— An especially felicitous application of digital technology can be found in sequences — of which there are several in *Mononoke*— where the background must be seen to move as the camera itself moves. The hand-painted backgrounds created by a studio's art department often evince extraordinary complexity and a considerable amount of details, and therefore play a crucial role in conveying a film's distinctive pictorial style. Unfortunately, though, they are stationary. When it is necessary to endow a sequence with an illusion of motion, digital technology comes to the rescue in the specific form of texture mapping. The animators first produce a 3D model of the terrain where the sequence occurs. The pictures created by the art department are then mapped onto the digital model, making it possible for high-quality artistic work to move. A remarkable example of a sequence made with this procedure is the one in which Ashitaka is seen riding across the alluvian plane, a shifting plume of smoke rising in the distance from a burning temple.
- **Digital Painting**— This term refers to the application of color to animated images on the computer. As the digital painter Hiroaki Ishii has explained,

> the basic concepts behind digital painting are almost the same as those for painting animation cels ... when digital processing is needed, we run the finished image through the scanner, convert it to digital data, and then color the digitalized image.... After we're done with that, we perform additional photographic processes such as compositing and then output the final image on film [Ishii 1997, p. 182].

More than 16 million colors can be digitally created, but in the execution of *Mononoke* Studio Ghibli was deliberately self-restraining because it wished to remain faithful to its established aesthetic approach to color, whereby each Ghibli film has a distinctive chromatic palette dominated by a select range of hues. In the case of *Mononoke*, the scheme conceived by color designer Michiya Yasuda was dominated by cool shades (blues and greens) for the creation of the natural settings, while including deliberate tonal disruptions with an emphasis on warm hues (especially red) for Tataraba and for some of the more energetic action sequences. Once the basic chromatic scheme had been established and tested, a variety of colors derived from the main color chart

could then be digitally recorded in the computer palette menu and used in any number of scenes without unintentional alterations affecting the production.

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Upon the completion of *Mononoke*, Studio Ghibli's camera department manager Atsushi Okui prophetically stated: "if digitalization keeps progressing the way it is, eventually the job of the cameraman for animated films may disappear. I feel that *Princess Mononoke* may be the last animation that we photograph with conventional film, so we've tried to put all the know-how that we have accumulated into this film. We wanted to make it a compilation of noncomputerized animation techniques" (Okui 1997, p. 180). Okui's observations were indeed both prescient and pragmatic if one considers that Miyazaki's most recent productions, *Spirited Away* (2001) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), were edited through to entirely digital means.

15

Studio Ghibli, 1999–2001

Takahata's aesthetic priority in the production of *My Neighbors the Yamadas* (1999) was the achievement of a watercolor look. Since conventional pictures reliant on the standard paint-on-cel technique could hardly be expected to evoke this gentle painterly effect, digital technology was resorted to instead, and the movie became the first Studio Ghibli production to be drawn and animated completely on computers. Both the characters and the backgrounds signal a marked departure from Studio Ghibli's habitual style — with its luscious backgrounds and minutely detailed figures — insofar as they are rendered in an intentionally sketchy style.

Based on a hugely popular comic strip by Hisaichi Ishii, the movie is a loosely structured ensemble of vignettes portraying the daily life of the wacky Yamada family as they fight for control of the TV remote and deal with a gang of bikers who have descended upon their district. Producer Toshio Suzuki's initial proposal for an animated feature based on Ishii's output was at first met with considerable skepticism since Studio Ghibli had never before handled an even comparable graphic style, and some parties even felt that the venture might prove both aesthetically and financially detrimental. However, Takahata felt up to the challenge, regarding the project as an opportunity not only to explore novel stylistic territories but also to engage a relatively new technology. The studio's willingness to take risks should not be underestimated in this respect, for it bears witness not only to its staff's capacious approach to their medium but also, more broadly, to the nature of animation as an art form that is capable of continually defying accepted conventions and boundaries.

As Patrick Drazen has pointed out, what makes Takahata's film quite unique in the tradition of Japanese animations inspired by comics is indeed the fact that its source material is not — as would customarily be the case — a narrative *manga* but a four-panel strip: "While it seems easy to animate some *manga*, since they incorporate cinematic devices into their visual vocabulary, the four-panel strip, familiar in the West to any newspaper reader, almost defies conversion into an extended narrative" (Drazen 2003, p. 276). Takahata bridges the gap between the highly stylized and caricatural drawings used by Ishii and the requirements of animated cinema by means of technical and stylistic strategies that retain the vignette quality of the parent text and yet allude, without actually becoming overtly realistic, to the actual world and its everyday rhythms.

Thus, the production succeeds in remaining faithful to Studio Ghibli's commitment to authenticity even as *Yamadas* drastically departs from the studio's more regular registers.

Thematically, the film offers a down-to-earth approach to the ethos of *bushido*[1] and its injunction to do one's best in the pursuit of one's goals — even if these are most unlikely to be effortlessly accomplished — and unremittingly persevere against all odds. What the characters strive to achieve is often no more than a prosaically quotidian objective. Yet the absence from their lives of any explicitly (or indeed latently) heroical dimension does not make their aims any less significant in the contingent context of their routine. In fact, the Yamadas attach great importance to their goals and get deeply frustrated when things go, as they often do, quite simply wrong despite the volume of planning and dedication channeled into them. However, as *bushido* instructs, "you pull yourself together and try to get through it with as much dignity as you can muster. Certainly a lesson for any nation, but definitely for recession-weary Japan" (Drazen 2003, p. 277).

Many of the situations confronted by various members of the Yamada family are intrinsically inconsequential and commonplace, yet they derive dramatic intensity from Takahata's ability to show us how the Yamadas themselves feel about their circumstances. Thus, even trivial accidents, minor frustrations and daily annoyances come to be invested with a sense of pathos. Faithful to the retention of a modicum of verisimilitude in even the most obviously artificial production, Takahata hence intimates that the Yamadas' customary experiences matter, and that their stormy responses to paltry occurrences are not as preposterous as one may at first believe, because this is how the lives of most people in the real world actually function — and especially, in his view, in the context of the contemporary Japanese family with its workaday concerns and anxieties.

It should be noted, in this regard, that the Yamadas are in many ways a "salaryman" (*sarariiman*) family, reflecting the model that came into being in the late 1950s and 1960s, whereby power is neatly divided between a wage-earning husband working outside the home (and therefore likely to become something of a shadow figure), and a housewife (*shufu*) responsible for the management of the household and for the children's academic success.[2]

Nostalgia, a defining trait of Takahata's output that is especially prominent in *Grave of the Fireflies* and *Only Yesterday*, figures again in this movie, though in a less overt fashion due to its cumulatively more light-hearted tenor. This is borne out by the use of the 18th-century *haiku* as a means of recalling a lost age against which the present may be assessed. The employment of a piece of old Japanese literature in a contemporary context suggests, if considered in conjunction with the movie's watercolor aesthetic, that *Yamadas* could be regarded as the animated, modern adaptation of the traditional scroll. A daring experiment, the production holds a special place in Studio Ghibli's corpus due not only to its peculiar style but also to its role as the harbinger of a distinctively Ghiblian approach to animation in the digital age that shows how computers can be fruitfully deployed without the qualities of the hand-drawn image being thus ineluctably forsaken.

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Katsuya Kondou (character designer on *Kiki* and animation director on *Kiki*, *Only Yesterday*, *Ocean Waves* and *Howl's Moving Castle*) was responsible for the creation of the character designs for *The Aurora* (*Umi no Ourora*, 2000), a Nippon Television production that premiered at the New York Animé Festival. Set in the late 21st century, the movie dramatizes the quest to disclose the secrets of the Earth's origins and hence detect new natural resources, undertaken by a team of deep-sea archeologists in an excavation base situated no less than 6,500 meters below the ocean's surface. In the process, what they actually discover is a species of luminous bacteria, which apparently resent having been roused and express their indignation by attacking the base.

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Using the watercolor effects conceived for *My Neighbors the Yamadas* but less stylized characters than the Takahata film, the animated commercial *Delicious Tea* promotes a tea-based chilled drink, *Umacha*, from the Asahi Beverage Company. *Delicious Tea* bears witness to Studio Ghibli's flair for infusing the full magic of its style into all of its productions, from the most stirring adventure to the minutest animation.

16

Spirited Away

The production of *Spirited Away* started in February of 2000, with Miyazaki simultaneously playing the parts of director, storyboard artist, screenplay writer, and co-key animation checker. The production methods adopted for the film were very much in consonance with Miyazaki's habitual *modus operandi*: when work on the film started, the director had not yet developed the entire story, and this actually took shape at virtually the same pace as the storyboards did. The director's approach to movie-making is quintessentially incremental, for the production never operates according to foregone conclusions but is actually, up until its advanced stages, work in progress. "It's not me who makes the film," Miyazaki has stressed. "The film makes itself and I have no choice but to follow." Although this means that some ideas ultimately become redundant, the director endeavors to incorporate as much material as possible into the final production, as long as this does not imperil the story's overall coherence. To this effect, Miyazaki has stated: "A principle I adhere to when directing is that I make good use of everything my staff creates. Even if they make foregrounds that don't quite fit with my backgrounds, I never waste it and try to find the best use for it." Hence, if animation is a fundamentally developmental process for Miyazaki, it is also, no less crucially, an eminently collaborative effort.

Various sources of information regarding the production of *Spirited Away* indicate that the approach that the director tends to adopt towards a cinematic plot also applies to his conception of the story's *dramatis personae*: "The characters are born from repetition, from repeatedly thinking about them. I have their outline in my head. I become the character myself and as the character I visit the locations of the story many, many times. Only after that I start drawing the character, but again I do it many, many times, over and over. And I only finish just before the deadline" (Miyazaki 2001d). As the film was scheduled for release in July 2001, the studio had a mere 18 months at their disposal to complete the production.[1] By January 2001, only half the key frames had been realized, which forced Studio Ghibli's producer Toshio Suzuki to double the number of in-house keyframe artists and to seek the assistance of South Korean studios in the production of some outstanding in-between work.

The epigraph penned by the director for *Spirited Away* announces: "*For the people who used to be 10-years old, and the people who are going to be 10-years old."* This state-

ment is highly evocative in concisely encapsulating Miyazaki's approach to the worlds of children and adults as frequently incompatible yet also inveterately complementary realms. Indeed, "the people who are going to be 10-years old" may be children who have not yet reached but are approaching that age, and adults who are willing to revisit imaginatively their childhood and to let the film guide them in that direction.

Spirited Away outdistanced *Princess Mononoke* and became the highest-grossing Japanese film in history, as well as the recipient of a slew of international film awards (see Appendix 3). By the end of its theatre run, the film had managed to gross a total of around $230 million — which is comparable to a movie grossing $1 billion in the U.S. — and to do so in record time. As David Williams explains, Disney Pictures did their best to preserve the visual and narrative integrity of what has come to be regarded as a classic of contemporary Japanese cinema: in producing "an English dub/translation, Disney brought in the big guns — John Lasseter and Kirk Wise (both huge Miyazaki fans) — to supervise the North American release and they went through tremendous pains to make sure the translation was as faithful as possible to the original. For starters, they hired top-notch voice talent.... As promised, Disney left the film itself alone and simply made every effort possible to make sure that the more traditional ink and paint style of Miyazaki was only enhanced by their transfer efforts" (Williams 2003).

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Set in contemporary Japan, *Spirited Away* follows 10-year-old Chihiro as she changes from a moaning, sulky and probably rather spoiled little girl into one of Miyazaki's most tolerant and tenacious heroines. On their way to a new home, Chihiro and her parents inadvertently find themselves in a parallel universe not of their choosing. When the gluttonous parents avidly devour the ceremonial victuals reserved for the gods, they morph into massive pigs — which leaves Chihiro as their only (unlikely) savior. Chihiro's parents are afflicted by the blind self-confidence which, as the film goes on to demonstrate in increasingly vivid details, permeates entire cultures governed by the imperative of material satisfaction. As Noy Thrupkaew sardonically notes, these so-called adults "obviously haven't read their Homer, nor do they pay any heed to the park signs that read 'demon' or 'giant,' and so they start gnashing at the food like tourists at a Las Vegas buffet" (Thrupkaew 2002).

It is worth pointing out, at this juncture, that the term *Kamikakushi* literally refers to the situation of a person who is missing from the ordinary world as a result of having strayed into the world of the spirits. In a sense, this is also the fate that befalls Satsuki and Mei in *My Neighbor Totoro*. However, this is where possible similarities between the 1988 production and *Spirited Away* begin and end: while *Totoro*'s protagonists are eager to explore their new environment in both its natural and supernatural manifestations, Chihiro is utterly uninterested in the prospect of a new home and a new school and the attitude in which she is depicted in the opening sequence is spiritless indeed.

However, Chihiro soon exhibits quite unexpected emotional and intellectual resources, which she discovers — to her own surprise — as a result of having to accept the burden of responsibility as an inevitable duty which she cannot truly share with

anybody else. Indeed, when she tells Haku, the mysterious youth who offers her help in the early stages of her adventure, "I don't want to be alone," he dauntingly replies: "You have no choice." Thus, the protagonist develops from the sluggish and apathetic child witnessed in the opening scenes into a mature, enterprising young woman: by the end, the initially threatening prospects of a new home and a new school hardly appear challenging and Chihiro states that she "can handle it."

Ultimately, the movie intimates — in a prudently subdued, though optimistic, fashion — that the pluck and ingeniousness of a 10-year-old girl cannot be matched by any manner of sorcery. Thus, although the world evoked by *Spirited Away* is distinctly Japanese and flows from Japan's rich and unique folklore, at its core it also carries allegorical relevance to contemporary Western societies. This proposition will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

Following her parents' grotesque transformation, the protagonist's situation suddenly verges on the mystically surreal. As she finds herself alone in a terrifyingly beautiful world of gods, specters, monsters, ghouls, goblins and varyingly metamorphic figures, it turns out that what her father had initially thought of as an "amusement park" is really a supernatural town built around a bath house (run by the witch Yu-Baaba) used by weary spirits in need of rejuvenation. Haku helps her to understand the uncanny world wherein she is now trapped — most importantly, by showing Chihiro how to avoid becoming utterly invisible and insubstantial, and by advising her to seek employment at the bath house as her only hope of restoring her parents to normal and breaking the magical spells that incarcerate her.

In order to be granted a job, however, the heroine is forced to give her name to Yu-Baaba, who instantly proceeds to replace "Chihiro" with the moniker "Sen."[2] This key sequence foregrounds the importance of words in the movie, reflecting the notion — widespread among numerous ancient cultures — that all creatures are defined by their names, and that by knowing those names one may gain power over them. Miyazaki has stated that he believes firmly in the spiritual authority and gravity of purpose carried by words even today, and is indeed distressed at the thoughtlessness with which language is often used in modern times. The director himself has noted, in this respect:

> A word has power. In the world into which Chihiro has wandered, to say a word out of one's mouth has a grave importance. At Yuya [the bath house] ... if Chihiro says one word like "No" or "I wanna go home," the witch would quickly throw Chihiro out. She would have no choice but to keep aimlessly wandering until she vanishes, or is changed into a chicken to keep laying eggs until she is eaten. In turn, if Chihiro says "I will work here," even the witch cannot ignore her. Today, words are considered very lightly, as something like bubbles.... It is still true that a word has power. It's just that the world is filled with empty and powerless words. The act of depriving a person of one's name is not just changing how one person calls the other. It is a way to rule the other (person) completely. Sen becomes horrified when she realizes that she is losing the memory of her name, Chihiro [Miyazaki 2001a].

It is somewhat paradoxical that the initially timorous and immature protagonist should discover the qualities of courage and independence and thereby overcome all

manner of adversities and fears as "Sen" — i.e. in the identity role projected onto her by Yu-Baaba — rather than as "Chihiro" — her putatively real self. This narrative ploy could be taken as an implicit debunking of the liberal humanist faith in the existence of a stable self and parallel exposure of the culturally constructed character of our subject positions.

In planning what would eventually become *Spirited Away*, Miyazaki had originally intended to produce an animated adaptation of Sachiko Kashiwaba's *Kirino Mukouno Fushigina Machi* (*The Mysterious Town Behind the Fog*, 1995), the story of a little girl who wanders into a parallel universe populated by bizarre characters and pervaded by an intensely surreal atmosphere. However, the project was not developed as a straightforward adaptation, and other stories, images and memories managed to gradually wind their ways into Miyazaki's notebooks and sketchbooks. Among the most prominent sources of influence are undoubtedly Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), with which *Spirited Away* shares a taste for preposterous metamorphoses and for weird characters driven by both benevolent and reprehensible intentions; Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* (1883), whence Miyazaki may have derived the idea of a bestializing amusement park, though it is noteworthy that the director shuns Collodi's moralistic drift by making greedy adults rather than playful children the victims of grotesque transformations; Homer's *Odyssey*, where the topos of porcine metamorphosis also plays an important part.

It is common for Miyazaki to base his characters on real-life models whom he has had opportunity to observe closely and assiduously, which is instrumental to the director's ability to conjure up fully rounded personalities. Thus, Chihiro's mother was inspired by a Ghibli employee. The conception of the girl herself, more importantly, was based on the director's close observation of one of his best friends' 10-year old daughter in the course of one of his customary summer retreats to a mountain cabin in Shinshu. Looking at the girl, the director reflected: "sure, she's happy and high-spirited now, but growing up in a world like this, will she be able to maintain that disposition for the rest of her life?" ("*Spirited Away*: Production"). Using this musing as his point of departure, Miyazaki decided to make a film about a 10-year old girl — something he had never attempted before.

Settings are also frequently based on actual places close to the director's heart. Studio Ghibli drew inspiration from several real-life locations in the creation of the ambiance envisioned by Miyazaki for *Spirited Away*: the streets, shop fronts, decorations and signs that characterize the restaurant district in which Chihiro's parents come upon the fateful repast are closely based on the architectural and stylistic features of actual venues, while the hectic bath house kitchens are modeled on the cooking areas of existing Tokyo restaurants. Moreover, a significant proportion of the town into which Chihiro and her parents unwittingly wander is based on the Edo-Tokyo Architectural Park situated near Studio Ghibli. This is an open-air exhibition of a range of buildings from the Tokyo area, relocated or reconstructed to preserve the material vestiges of various architectural styles that would otherwise have been entirely erased by wars, urban development or natural catastrophes such as earthquakes and *tsunami*. Most of the

edifices date back to the Meiji period (1868–1912) and constitute both a historical document and a source of inspiration for current generations to reflect upon the past and its legacy. Significantly, one of the most remarkable buildings to be seen in the architectural park is a public bath house analogous to the one represented in *Spirited Away*.

Pixar director John Lasseter has commented as follows on Miyazaki's special relationship with this park: "It is very important to him.... What they've done is devote this park to the preservation of traditional architecture. Not the temples necessarily, but the everyday houses, the everyday restaurants and shops and there's a bath house and architecture from all levels of society. He goes there quite a bit" (Lasseter 2001). The director himself has stated that the architectural park is a space that enables him to reflect on forgotten lifestyles and traditions and to appreciate their ongoing, albeit often unacknowledged, influence upon the present: "I feel nostalgic here, especially when I stand here alone in the evening, near closing time, and the sun is setting.... I think we have forgotten the life, the buildings, and the streets we used to have not so long ago" (Miyazaki 2001b).

Miyazaki is eager to recapture a sense of tradition and belonging in a culture that is increasingly shaped by the imperative of homogenization and simultaneous atrophy of the imagination. As Mick Broderick has pointed out, "The post-industrial age for Miyazaki is tempered by a sense of loss, not so much of innocence, but of origin where the importance of space, place and context needs reinvigoration" (Broderick 2003). This revitalizing project finds expression in a number of characters based on Japanese history and mythology, though typically complicated by Miyazaki's own imaginative interventions. These include female figures drawn from the ancient Heian period, with plucked eyebrows redrawn in the guise of two black dots high on their foreheads intended to convey constant surprise; the prankish water demons dubbed *Kappa*, whose powers may be harnessed by bowing to them and thus facilitating the release of their magical contents; the masked *Kasuga* spirits inspired by the rituals periodically undertaken at one of Japan's most prestigious shrines[3]; *Kawa no Kami* (the "River Spirit"—from *kawa* = "river" + *kami* = "spirit"), unceremoniously tagged *Okusare-Sama* (the "Stink Spirit"—from *kusaru* = "to rot") in its putrid configuration; *Oshira-Sama* (the "Spirit of *Daikon* Radish"—from *shiro* = "white"); *Ootori-Sama* ("Bird Spirits"—from *tori* = "bird"); and *Ushioni* ("Antlered Spirits" or "Cow Goblins"—from *ushi* = "cow").

Further visual allusions to tradition include the Shinto gate and putatively supernatural dwellings seen by Chihiro and her parents in the course of their calamitous car ride, as well as the stone statue protecting the entrance to the red building, depicted in a Totoro-like style yet rendered latently intimidating by its double-facedness and apparent ability to control the breeze. A quasi-religious flavor is also communicated by the open space inside the tunnel: partly redolent of the waiting-room of an abandoned train station, it simultaneously exhibits stained-glass windows and the remnants of a votive candle.

However, *Spirited Away* also evinces a pragmatic acknowledgment of the apparent insignificance of tradition for the contemporary world, and hence of the necessity—if one is to engage with the past and its values at all—of making traditions relevant to

the present. This is precisely why the film's animistic deities are turned into emphatically fleshy, decadent quasi-aristocrats anxious only to be pampered and fed the choicest of dishes. It is also notable that incorporeal as they may be, the spirits are sufficiently bound up with the carnal domain as to be able to instantly recognize the smell of a human and to register it as grossly unpleasant. While this ploy may dwarf those beings' presumed nobility, their irreverent portrayal also has the effect of throwing into relief the logic of rampant consumption to which post-industrial societies are enslaved in a defamiliarizing fashion, by being associated not with the corporeal dimension — as one could expect — but with the spiritual one.

Relatedly, although everything at the bath house may at first seem utterly unpredictable and eerie, the film's fantasy world is utterly coherent and indeed infused with troubling allegorical connotations. Beneath the comedy, the opulent animation and the sense of adventure, potent undercurrents of isolation and rootlessness flow unchecked. While the protagonist herself is left alone in a strange land whose denizens deem her the strangest of them all, Yu-Baaba's world in its entirety is imbued with a ubiquitous sense of loneliness. It is a world of greed and disconnection in which one is continually exposed to the danger of losing one's identity. The character of Kaonashi ("No Face") encapsulates all of these feelings: his facelessness obviously alludes to the loss of identity — a predicament which he struggles to assuage through spectacular displays of intemperate appetite and the desperate, deeply moving yearning to establish some kind of connection with Sen as his last hope of transcending his crippling solitude.

Significantly, it will be not only through Sen but also through the only other character in the film's spirit-world not to be driven purely by selfishness and greed that Kaonashi will eventually discover companionship and a sense of belonging — namely Zeniba, Yu-Baaba's twin sister. As Jerry Chen has observed, "Although the two sisters look, dress, and talk the same way, the personalities are wildly different. While Yu-Baaba is the owner of an extravagant bath house for the gods, the centerpiece of a festive town, Zeniba lives by herself in a small, isolated cottage with flowers on the doorframe" (Chen 2002, p. 7). Most importantly, when Zeniba tells the heroine that things that have happened in the past are never totally erased and that it is sometimes necessary to engage in the effort of recovering them, however hard this may be, for both one's sake and the love of others, her sister's world — namely "one of forgetfulness and stolen identities" — is drastically challenged by her own: "one of recovered old memories and a strong sense of self" (Chen 2002, p. 8). This lesson will prove absolutely vital in the climax, where Chihiro's reactivation of a submerged early-childhood memory will enable her to remind Haku of his true identity as the Kohaku River Spirit prior to his subjugation by Yu-Baaba.

The situations and events that unfold within Yuya repeatedly allude, more or less explicitly, not only to the issues of consumerism and materialism but also to environmental depletion and societal atomization. At the same time, the narrative hints at the sinister realities of juvenile prostitution (Chihiro is forced to sell her services to Yu-Baaba), child abuse (Baby is anchored to a state of disabling infantile passivity) and pedophilia (there is something pathological about Kaonashi's desire to relate to Sen). As Thrupkaew has noted,

> Run by forced labor and powered by avarice, this bath house of the spirits has its own ambivalence, and its own darkness. When [Kaonashi] conjures up fistfuls of gold, the bath house staff launch an all-out hospitality offensive, stuffing the spirit with roasts and fish and soup and noodles to sate its ever-increasing appetite. One character performs a little ditty, something like, "The bigger its butt gets/the more there is to kiss!" And kiss it the characters do, until the customer starts eating *them*. In this world just like in ours, greed begets greed [Thrupkaew 2002].

According to Chris Lanier, "in the exploration of the spirit world ... *Spirited Away* spreads out into one of the most visually baroque films ever made. Its look and density are so unique ... I found myself comparing it to paintings: intricate Byzantine art, or ancient Buddhist frescoes of the universe — religious art suggesting transparent skyscrapers or towering hives honeycombed with buzzing spirits — windows opening onto fantastic figures, each one particular and strange, each inhabiting its own individual corner of the vast cosmological blueprint" (Lanier 2002, "Spirited Away to the Working World" 1). Nevertheless, this metaphysical vision does not signal an escape into a fantasy domain with no connections whatever to the real world, for "the bizarre, endlessly fecund spirit world is actually the 'mundane' adult world, seen from the margins — at the gate of entry, as it were, with all its grotesquerie and strangeness fresh and intact" (Lanier 2002, "Spirited Away to the Working World" 2). Concomitantly, the movie evokes vivid images of the actual world in the train journey sequence, where the "ghostly grey passengers ... embarking then disembarking to their anonymous lives" (Lanier 2002, "Spirited Away to the Working World" 3) resemble real-life commuters whose identities have become as spiritually tenuous as the bodies of the film's spectral figures have become literally translucent.

It should also be noted, in this regard, that the journey sequence constitutes a paradigmatic example of exquisitely paced animation, as well as testimony to Miyazaki's ability to capture and pictorially render a particular atmosphere without recourse to verbal language. It is indeed arduous to conceive of words that might have evoked as effectively as the sequence's images do the spectral non-hour through which the train quietly moves, as though awash in limbic tides.

Most importantly, the magical universe of *Spirited Away* is inhabited by a multitude of hard-working people whose only recognized value is the role they play in satisfying the desires of capricious creatures who feel automatically entitled to comfort and pleasure, and have hence settled into ritualized routines that are as artificial as their mask like faces. For the laborers, the only redeeming traits of this otherwise brutalizing nexus of priorities are their freedom to humorously exploit their masters' carnal weaknesses so as to yield a modicum of control over them — as evinced by Lin's taunting of the bath house manager by means of a roasted newt — and, more importantly, the hope that toil may at least partially fortify them rather than consign them to a fate of total alienation. This argument has been persuasively expounded by Andrew Osmond:

> [Chihiro's] switch to active protagonist is signaled in the second half, when she hitches up her worker's uniform, runs along a treacherous metal pipe that nearly drops her to her doom, then climbs the bath house to the top. What causes this change? Miyazaki's

> answer is hard work, but of a different order from the jovial capitalism of Disney's dwarves. One of the director's most popular earlier films, *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), was about a teen witch making flying deliveries while coping with adolescence. *Spirited Away* has a similarly offbeat work regime with Chihiro tending Japanese gods and learning responsibility and purpose. This has less to do with stereotypes of the industrious Japanese than with Miyazaki's own leftist leanings and belief in empowerment through labor. What makes it more than dreary moralism are the witty riffs on the theme. Chihiro's first trial is to help a soot-sprite carry unnaturally heavy lumps of coal; she succeeds, only for all its co-workers to drop their burdens before her en masse [Osmond 2003a].

The film's intimate connection with the real world is corroborated by its take on environmental issues. Consistently foregrounded in earlier Miyazaki productions, these are again raised in *Spirited Away*, primarily through the unnerving image of the River Spirit: a once noble and pure creature transformed into a slimy, fetid monster by its unintentional absorption of heaps of junk metal of precisely the kind one would expect to find at the bottom of many of today's streams. (The sequence revolving around the reception and purification of the malodorous deity was not inspired by Japanese lore but by Miyazaki's direct experience of the ecological damage perpetrated upon a river flowing in the vicinity of his country home.) A succinct but visually evocative allusion to the problem of pollution can also be found in the image of the bath house chimneys discharging black smoke into the surrounding blue sky. A further instance of the film's cultural relevance to contemporary Japanese society is supplied by references to the economy — for example, in the scene where Chihiro's father points out that myriad theme parks were built in the 1990s and then abandoned when the economy went bust.

Spirited Away perpetuates Miyazaki's commitment to the exploration of the tensions that inevitably occur between and within natural, social, political, economic, domestic and fantastic environments in such a fashion as to convey the impression that what is unraveling before our eyes is a grimly familiar dream. Its hosts of shape-shifters, grotesquely distorted creatures, vaporous spirits and murderous paper birds are some of Miyazaki's most striking visual metaphors. But the overtly fantastic dimension of these figures does not for a moment obfuscate the film's trenchant flair for social critique. The director has stated that even though the world he created for the movie is a "fabrication," he "didn't lie": "It's all about the truth. Everything I wanted to say is in this movie.... The worst movies are those that lie to you while pretending to show you real life. Kids know that is a lie. I'm dealing with real issues" (quoted in Adilman 2002).

At the same time, *Spirited Away* offers a synthesis of the playful simplicity to be found in *Totoro*, *Kiki* and the slapstick portions of *Porco Rosso* and the grand spectacle characteristic of *Nausicaä*, *Laputa*, *Mononoke* and *Howl*. The spirit of simplicity is inherent in Miyazaki's sustained affirmation of the importance of basic human qualities — primarily, respect, loyalty, selflessness — which can only be discovered through self-scrutiny and a related willingness to accept that when we scoff at the outside world we would do better if we were to look inside ourselves. Miyazaki's film also cautions us about the dangers entailed by the cynical dismissal of those qualities as worn-out

stereotypes by showing that it is precisely around the simplest of values that the richest narratives may be woven. The epic dimension, conversely, is embodied by the movie's stylistic feel, by the sweeping breadth of its visuals in the rendition of both the atavistic magnetism of the natural environment and the bath house's palatial glory, and by the sheer — and potentially limitless — proliferation of fantastical beings. Thus, *Spirited Away* seamlessly interweaves a touchingly intimate affective strand and a colorfully sensational cinematic thread.

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Spirited Away employs walks most effectively as a means of investing its characters with distinctive personalities and to evoke particular emotions, states of mind and proclivities. Thus, in the early sequences, the protagonist is graphically defined as an insecure, cautious and immature type by her hesitant walk and tendency to cling to her mother. These elements of Chihiro's character in the initial portion of the story are thrown into relief by the overtly confident walking styles evinced by her parents: Yuuko Ogino, her mother, comes across as calm and self-composed by virtue of her relaxed gait, while Akio Ogino, her father, appears not just assured but arrogantly so.

Chihiro's control over her movements increases as she gradually attains a higher degree of self-knowledge. This is clearly evinced by the contrast between the early scene in which she flings herself down the precipitous stairs leading to the boiler room, driven by sheer panic, and the later sequence in which she bravely embarks, guided by an overarching sense of responsibility towards Haku, upon a much more perilous crawl along decrepit pipes in order to reach her mortally wounded friend.

The film also uses in tantalizing ways what practitioners refer to as the *breaking of joints*— namely, the deliberately exaggerated articulation of elbows, shoulders, wrists, hips, knees and ankles in order to suggest a heightened impression of flexibility. This technique enables animators to create supple and plastic bodies by effecting curvilinear motion on the basis of incremental clockwise and anticlockwise rotations of straight lines around a fulcrum (e.g. a character's elbow), rather than through the use of arcs — which would inevitably end up conveying the impression that the character is not actually limber but rubberized. The breaking of joints was obviously vital to the animation of the character of Kamaji, the six-armed controller of the boiler room located in the basement of the bath house: not only is he endowed with an extraordinary number of limbs, each is also capable of flexing and elongating in preternatural ways. The technique was also effectively utilized in the animation of the lamppost that guides Chihiro and her companions to Zeniba's cottage, first hopping on its single leg, then retracting the appendage and finally resuming the appearance of a hanging lantern once its role as an usher has been played: the breaking of joints is made especially remarkable, in this instance, by the fact that its effects are neatly concentrated on one individual limb.

Facial flexibility is also important in *Spirited Away*, and it manifests itself with varying degrees of intensity. While in Yu-Baaba's case, the animation underscores her tendency towards grotesquely distorted expressions, in Haku's case, the emphasis is placed on imperturbability. Thus, in order to evoke an extreme emotion, such as fury,

the animation magnifies the old crone's already pervasive distortions to monstrous extremes and only alters the boy's mien by means of subtle, almost imperceptible details — e.g. the slight parting of his fringe as he becomes incensed in the course of negotiating with Yu-Baaba. Chihiro's face is, at first, relatively stable and marked by feelings of either detachment or latent apprehension. However, as her character develops, her expressions become accordingly more complex, varied and evocative of a wide range of emotions — most memorably, in the course of the climactic flight sequence. However, the protagonist also displays some interesting and entertaining facial expressions in the early segments of the movie — for example, in her silent exchange with the stone creature situated at the entry of the tunnel and in her negotiation of the preposterously heavy lump of coal which she feels obliged to carry to the boiler once it has been landed at her feet by a mischievous *susuwatari*.

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As Michael Abraham has noted the "full transition from traditional ink and paint techniques and shooting to digital ink and paint and compositing was made [by Studio Ghibli] in 1997. 'We are a traditional animation production studio,' says Mitsunori Kataama, 3D-CG supervisor at Studio Ghibli. 'There are about 150 people presently working here. Within that group, we have three sections using computers for production — ten people work on ink and paint, four in compositing and seven of us in 3D-CG. We mainly use Silicon Graphics workstations, with over 30 CPUs, including those used as servers. We also use Linux and Mac OS computers.' That set-up makes for an immensely clever, and ultimately virtuous, method, and it is employed to great effect in [Miyazaki's] most recent film." Moreover, with *Spirited Away* it was possible to accomplish "[a]ll of the animation, backgrounds, compositing and 3D work ... in-house. Working diligently on 100 of the movie's 1,400 scenes, Kataama and his team dealt primarily with complicated scenes impossible to create solely by hand, and including intense 3D camera work and object animation" (Abraham 2001).

Therefore, *Spirited Away* has built on the experience gained from the scrupulous integration of traditional animation and CGI undertaken in *Mononoke*. Although the film is fully digital, its style still reflects Miyazaki's penchant for hand-crafted effects. Thus, as director of images Atsushi Okui explains, Studio Ghibli has regarded *Spirited Away* "as another step in the hand-illustrated cel-animation process developed through past Ghibli films. We took pains to ensure that CG did not call attention to itself in the film ... CG shouldn't influence the art style." Conversely, it is vital to appreciate what digital technology alone has to offer and to maximize its potential: "backgrounds and concept art are drawn on paper, but once they're digitized, you can do anything. Colors and other new elements can be added to backgrounds. Concept art can be separated according to various elements and processed accordingly" (Okui 2002, p. 182). However, as digital animation supervisor Kataama maintains, "Just because everything can be done by CG entirely doesn't mean it should be 100% CG. For example, the supervision of lighting and other effects comes from the camera staff" (Okui 2002, pp. 182–183).

At the same time, as the art director Yoji Takeshige has stressed, the fact that "the entire film was processed digitally" did not mean that his department could minimize their share of elbow grease as, in fact, they "had to work even harder to paint natural-looking backgrounds that could tolerate digital processing" (Takeshige 2002a, p. 127). An especially important part was played, in this regard, by the depiction of a distinctively Japanese setting, instantly identifiable in the images of the vermillion-red clock tower, the signboard architecture, the stone stairs and the hanging lanterns, and by the evocation of changing moods predicated upon chromatic shifts and related lighting effects. The atmosphere of the restaurant district, for instance, alters dramatically as the glaring afternoon sunlight — in which it appears essentially gaudy and toy-like despite its alarmingly uninhabited status and ominous signs — gives way to an intimidating scene when night descends and the lanterns come to an incandescently vibrant life of their own.

The movie's evocation of dusk in all its spooky charm is unique in cinema in general and not merely in animation. The arrival of the brightly lit, spirit-laden boat confirms the twilight hour's atmospheric ambiguity by introducing into the scene equal doses of lustrous radiance and inscrutable gloom. Brilliant colors and warm glows cannot unproblematically assuage the sense of impending doom implicit in the scene. A simultaneously comical and irredeemably alien being, the squatting frog gargoyle on the river bank, neatly sums up this equivocal mood, its grotesque mouth and blank eyes supplying in themselves a mocking distillation of the unfathomable.

According to Takeshige, the elaboration of an appropriate color design was of paramount importance:

> The reds were emphasized throughout the film ... as the film's "theme color." ... Unblended straight colors have rarely been used in previous Ghibli films, but since we were really going for red in this film, we decided to paint with pure red paint. There's a flashy gold in certain locations, such as the bath house interior and Yu-Baaba's room. We used shades of yellow paint for this color. We would then touch it up with highlighting (reflection) or adding orange, and by reducing the surrounding colors, the color shined like gold [Takeshige 2002b, p. 72].

The same fundamental color scheme, moreover, was adopted in the depiction of the myriad ornaments and accessories that lend Yuya its unmistakable identity: from the haunting wall paintings, giant vases on gold-plated pedestals, mammoth chandeliers and luxurious carpets to the meticulously detailed upholstery, desk lamps, leather-bound tomes and mesmerizing corridors of mirrors. Chromatic juxtapositions emphasizing the contrast between somber and ostentatious shades were concomitantly utilized in order to reinforce the hierarchically conceived character of Yuya's architectural structure — from the train station where the coal is delivered, situated at the very bottom of the location, through the boiler room, the dorms, the baths and leisure rooms, to the crowning glory of Yu-Baaba's own quarters.

It is also noteworthy, in this context, that although the film abounds with astonishing transformation sequences achieved by digital means (a particular example is dis-

cussed later), other metamorphic effects have been realized by traditional means. For instance, in the representation of Haku in his dragon guise, Miyazaki aimed at emphasizing the character's protean faculties by making the dragon allude to a variety of creatures — e.g. a gecko, a snake and an eel. The locked teeth, however, are unmistakably canine: funnily enough, since Miyazaki's younger assistants had never owned a dog as a pet, they had to visit the local Animal Hospital in order to study the mechanics of a dog's mouth, and hence produce the drawings for the scene in which the Haku-dragon is fed by Chihiro a healing pill exactly as the director intended (source: *Spirited Away* DVD, Disney Pictures 2004, Special Edition, Disc 2). Haku's metamorphic qualities were evoked through a meticulously detailed choreographing of the creature's changing patterns of motion. Haku's case, therefore, suggests that Miyazaki would concur with Disney art director/designer Ken Anderson's assertion that "[p]antomime is the basic art of animation. *Body language* is the root and fortunately it is universal" (quoted in Williams 2001, p. 324; emphasis added).

In his discussion of digitization in *Spirited Away*, Osmond offers an amusing anecdote: "Initially Miyazaki was very cagey about using computers in his films, saying he would be the first to be replaced by machines. He wouldn't even use computers for color designs, dismissing them as tools for incompetents. However, he relented after his producer got him hooked on a *Shougi* (Japanese chess) game on the studio's Power Mac" (Osmond 2003b, p. 101). Key digital techniques employed in the movie are described below:

- **Layering** — For the sequence in which, through Chihiro's and Yu-Baaba's combined efforts, the polluted river spirit is cleansed, four separate layers were used to produce what is indubitably one of the movie's most stunning parts. The layers included: a basic painted background; a cluster of CG 3D objects; a representation of reflection and shadow elements; a representation of black-and-white gradation elements evoking foam-like consistency. Layering was also effectively used in the renderings of: No Face as he turns invisible (with distinct elements for various parts of the body and mask); the *susuwatari* (as their bodies, arms, legs and lumps of charcoal were handled in great detail as separate elements before being digitally composited); and the scene in which Haku leads Chihiro through the rhododendron garden (with separate elements for the human characters and for the flowers in both the background and the foreground).
- **Morphing** — This technique was used most spectacularly in the part of the sequence mentioned above wherein the spirit disgorges the garbage that afflicts him: "The animation for the sludge pouring out of the river spirit was produced by morphing the gradation lines in the animation drawing ... the gradation lines are created by pointing at the sludge lines of the key drawing. They resemble the lines of a contour map" (Oniki 2002, p. 185).
- **Digital Water** — The visualization of the sea surface by digital means is undoubtedly one of *Spirited Away*'s most memorable achievements — especially if one bears in mind that water is a hard element to manipulate digitally due to the

vagaries of light refraction and reflection. For the sequence in which Haku returns to Yuya, a painted background was digitally composited with CG images of the light falling on the marsh, reflections and refractions, and waves modulated by means of morphing. Importantly, water was not rendered uniformly throughout the film but was actually made to resemble cel animation in some sequences and endowed with a photographic look in others, depending on the aesthetic requirements of their specific contexts.

- **Ray Tracing**— This refers to a technique used to give the impression of CG objects being touched by light beams in the same way as corporeal entities would in the real world. A good example of the application of this tool to *Spirited Away* can be found in the sequence in which Chihiro observes an islet through the train window on her way to Zeniba's house, specifically in the rendition of the light reflections on the sea surface.
- **Texture Mapping**— The sequence in which the heroine's parents plunder the mystical food and are transformed into pigs bears witness to Studio Ghibli's painstaking devotion to minutiae. Many of the plates in the Chinese restaurant were depicted with as much detail as one would expect to find in an entire background illustration. Texture mapping was used to superimpose detailed polychromatic patterns onto CG 3D objects.
- **Digital Editing**— Having used the Avid editing system "Media Composer" and having been impressed with its performance, Studio Ghibli recently upgraded to an "Avid Symphony" state-of-the-art editorial finishing system for its forthcoming projects. The Symphony system, with 288 gigabytes of storage, will be greatly beneficial to the studio's work since, as editor Tamaki Jojo explains, "The image quality will be much better." It is worth noting, in this regard, that "Studio Ghibli started using the Symphony system ... for the DVD release of *Princess Mononoke*. The packaged content (apart from the original film) was all edited using the high-end finishing system" ("Avid on *Spirited Away*").[4]

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Combining narrative and structural coherence with a gallery of prismatically varied characters and incidents, and endowing even the most peripheral shots with multi-layered poetic connotations, *Spirited Away* eludes monolithic interpretation, positing itself at once as a coming-of-age quest, a reflection on alter egos, an adult fable and, no less crucially, an adventurous experiment with both traditional and burgeoning animation techniques. Concomitantly, the film resists generic classification, for it amalgamates the fairytalish and the comical, with effective — if only occasional — forays into horror. Hence, the film attests to Miyazaki's ability to engineer the coalescence, within a single production, of narrative, graphic and expressive potentialities that many audiences may deem irreconcilable.

Spirited Away's heady journey into the imaginary ultimately results in a tour de force of world-building. The universe which thus comes into existence abides by the paradoxical logic of dreams, whereby all sorts of rules are irreverently transgressed or

suspended, yet credibility is never entirely sacrificed. Miyazaki's magic realism is so thoroughly self-consistent, despite its audacious dalliance with the bizarre and the implausible, as to appear more real than reality itself— to the point that when Chihiro eventually frees her parents and the lights of the bath house fade to give way to daytime common sense, some of us will wish they could be relit so as to allow us to immerse ourselves for a moment longer into a world which, in fact, we already sense as far away, and irretrievably lost.

17

Studio Ghibli, 2002–2003

Based on the *manga* by Aoi Hiiragi entitled *Neko no Danshaku, Baron* (literally translated as *Baron, the Cat Baron*), Hiroyuki Morita's *The Cat Returns* (*Neko no Ongaeshi*, 2002)[1] had originally been planned as a TV production exclusively engaging Studio Ghibli's young employees. As a semi-sequel capitalizing on the enormous popularity of its predecessor, *Whisper of the Heart*, and actually reintroducing in novel roles some of the characters made famous by the 1995 production, the project was considered a safe option for the junior talents involved. The richness, breadth and quality of the completed storyboards eventually persuaded the studio's senior members — especially Miyazaki, who served as executive producer, and Suzuki, who served as producer — to let it develop into a feature-length production destined for theatrical release.

Though the film was not quite a number-one hit, its box-office performance was more than satisfactory — possibly thanks, at least partly, to the inclusion of Miyazaki's name in bold characters in all the ads and posters — and it grossed $53 million, surpassing *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, *Star Wars: Episode 2* and *Spiderman*.

The Cat Returns is more light-hearted and playful than the average Ghibli production, though it undeniably contains moments of danger and not altogether pleasant narrative surprises. Like other Ghibli films, it focuses on the theme of self-development (graphically underscored by its schoolgirl protagonist's emotional and physical metamorphosis), depicted as a process beset by frequent disappointments and anxieties.[2] At the same time, it offers a dispassionate critique of a totalitarian regime underpinned by class and gender inequalities, military rule and Orwellian strategies of surveillance. A serious message is also encapsulated by the sequences showing the heroine, Haru, as a small child performing a charitable act towards a destitute kitten and, later, her rescue from a thorny situation by the very same creature (Yuki), now grown into an adult. The sequences underscore the values of memory and gratitude in a poignantly simple vein and are, in their own way, as moving as some of the most memorable moments in Miyazaki's opus. Concurrently, the message conveyed to the child Haru by the kitten anticipates the heroine's own experiences later in life, as the little animal is supposed to have "told [her] it is tough to make a living in this world."

The movie follows Haru as she wanders from the ordinary world with its petty frustrations and mishaps into the Realm of Cats as a result of having saved the life of

a cat that turns out to be the Crown Prince and, after being showered with unwelcome feline rewards (including hordes of gift-wrapped mice delivered directly to her school locker), being chosen by the King as his son's future wife. The film echoes *Spirited Away* (its production period actually overlapped in part with that of Miyazaki's 2001 movie) in enacting a transition from everyday Japan to a parallel universe, where nothing is quite what it appears to be, by means of a dramatic shift that comes across, paradoxically, as simultaneously jarring and seamless.

The Cat Returns exhibits several visual traits that have been characteristically close to Miyazaki's heart since the early phases of his career, even though the director was not involved in the creative part of the production. These include the extensive use of flight-based sequences unfolding across vibrantly alive skies, an emphasis on vertical and diagonal lines as a means of suggesting dynamism and vitality, and painstaking attention to natural, architectural and domestic details. The film uses architectural imagery most effectively, succinctly conveying the gulf that separates the quotidian and the feline dimensions by means of juxtapositions and contrasts. While the representation of the everyday world and its bustling cityscape conveys a sense of normality verging on monotony (though not on urban dreariness as it does in *Whisper of the Heart*), the fantasy world exhibits a combination of rustic serenity and magical opulence.[3] The liminal domain mysteriously poised between Haru's world and the Realm of Cats is especially intriguing due to its inclusion of architectural elements that are made to look akin to theatrical sets and deliberately toy-like: for example, Baron's exquisitely furnished abode has all the lovable features of a traditional doll's house, allowing for the incorporation into the animation of body language redolent of *Alice in Wonderland*.[4]

On the whole, the sequences that take place in the imaginary domain are not crafted with the kind of painterly splendor or contemplative beauty to be found in other Ghibli productions. However, this is not necessarily a shortcoming and could even, in fact, be taken as a deliberate ploy, Morita's simpler approach to the depiction of the film's settings being well suited to the production's more comical mood. Indeed, several otherworld scenes, and especially the chase sequences through the maze and into the tower, are more reminiscent of the crazy slapstick of *The Castle of Cagliostro* than of any Studio Ghibli movie.

Where character design is concerned, it should be noted that *The Cat Returns* departs quite drastically from the studio's customary style, most prominently in the portrayal of the protagonist herself. As Daniel Thomas has observed, "There's a sharper look that's lighter on the details (much in the style of Japanese watercolors) but bright, sharp, urban" (Thomas 2004b).

The film comments allegorically on the very art form that makes its existence possible in the first place, proposing that in the magical space of transition inhabited by Baron and his associates, artists are able to channel into their work emotions and thoughts so authentic that their creations manage to come to life. This notion is foreshadowed by the character of the charismatic feline figurine first introduced in *Whisper of the Heart* in the scene where he describes his original city as a place pervaded by magic. In the sequel, that world is imaginatively revamped, and it is suggested that

within its bewitched folds, "when people create something with all their hearts and hopes, the creation is given a soul."

The documentary included in the Region 2 (Japan version) DVD of *The Cat Returns*, featuring interviews with Morita, Miyazaki, Takahata and Hiiragi, elliptically mirrors these reflections by illustrating the creative processes involved in the planning and production of the movie itself. The documentary's various interviews indicate that while *Whisper* is the immediate source of inspiration for Morita's film, other Studio Ghibli movies have deeply influenced its style and themes. The most conspicuous examples are *My Neighbor Totoro*, with which *The Cat Returns* shares a hearty appetite for the supernatural (as well as a flagrantly "overweight" key character); *Grave of the Fireflies*, in that as Haru's discovery of the Cats' Kingdom echoes the deep sense of wonder experienced by Seita and Setsuko when they first encounter the hosts of glowing insects; and both *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Only Yesterday*, with which *The Cat Returns* has in common a delicately rendered evocation of self-exploration and the attainment of independence. The documentary also shows how the movie's urban settings were meticulously constructed on the basis of extensive photographic evidence, most notably in the depiction of the narrow alleys, stairs, walls and rooftops negotiated by Haru in her journey to the "Cat Business Office." Moreover, the character of Muta (based on the feline commuter presented in *Whisper*) turns out to have been based on an actual cat, normally allowed to walk in and out of Studio Ghibli at his convenience, while Yuki was apparently modeled according to another itinerant feline resident of the Koganei area.

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The first *Ghiblies* (*Giburiizu*) resulted from a project initially conceived by the late Yoshifumi Kondou, who had drawn a comic strip for *Animage* magazine centered on the employee of an imaginary animation studio named "Nonaka-kun" (please note that the *real* Nonaka Shinsuke works at Studio Ghibli in an administrative capacity). *Ghiblies* aired on April 8, 2000 as part of a TV special about Studio Ghibli. One of the intentions was to familiarize the general public with some of the company's activities in a humorous/parodic vein. The second *Ghiblies* (*Giburiizu 2*) was a theatrical short, released and exhibited with *The Cat Returns* in the summer of 2002. Having been distributed on DVD, the latter is both better known and available for close study. As a collection of sketches about the employees that work at an imaginary animation studio, it is also an oblique way of commenting on the real Studio Ghibli staff and on their distinctive personality traits, and indeed on their quirks and hobbyhorses. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Miyazaki himself should feature in porcine form.

The lines of continuity between *Ghiblies* and *Ghiblies 2* are clear enough to indicate that the latter constitutes both a prolongation and an elaboration of the project set in motion by the former. Thus, considered in tandem, the two shorts could be regarded as something of a work in progress endowed with a quasi-organic quality. An eminently formalistic rendition of various technical approaches typically associated with Studio Ghibli, the *Ghiblies* episodes underscore the company's aversion to the mechanical repetition of well-tested effects and indulgence in crystallized formulae. They do so, some-

what self-reflexively, by confronting the technical dimension per se, in a fashion that could not feasibly be followed in a feature-length production.

The creation of *Ghiblies 2* was indeed largely motivated by director Yoshiyuki Momose's desire to document the studio's commitment to experimenting with a variety of styles and approaches to the medium and art of animation. At the same time, Momose was keen on investing the episodes with a ubiquitous private-joke flavor, making their characters reflect not so much the actual aptitudes of a selection of Ghibli employees as their personalities as he himself perceived them.[5]

The first sketch echoes the visual tone of Takahata's *My Neighbors the Yamadas* by virtue of its simplified lines and watercolor effects. In the second sketch, conversely, dark colors and strong lines are employed, while the final sketch gives the illusion that it was painted with pastels. While the three sketches are distinguished by specific moods and styles, the worlds they portray concurrently evoke radically different perceptions of space, ranging from realistically rendered spatial three-dimensionality to overtly cartoonish flatness. The use of CGI is notable, especially in the first sketch. This is therefore discussed below in some detail as a representative instance of Studio Ghibli's involvement with digital technology in the 21st century.

The scene with the three figures seated at the counter in the curry joint consists of several composited layers. For example, the body of the pig-like character emerged gradually through the incremental aggregation of separate elements (the arm, the face without the snout, the snout without the nostrils, the nostrils, the legs, the upper trunk), and the subsequent application of shadows and highlights to each component part. The background was also composited from separate elements for the light rays, steam and smoke, and the actual furniture and accessories, with chromatic gradations and varying degrees of textural density successively added to their skeletons and surfaces. The most spectacular use of CGI can be found in the rendition of the wafts of smoke and clouds of vapor rising from the pot of lethally hot curry sauce, entering the ventilation system and spilling out into an alleyway in the terrifying form of a death's-head, thereby knocking a stray cat flat against a brick wall. Particle systems software (Houdini and Softimage) was employed to create the clouds soaring from the pot to the ceiling and for the swirling plumes entering the vent. Both sets of clouds are realistically denser at source and more rarefied on the periphery.

To animate the scene in which the audience is allowed to see from within the vent the way in which the smoke enters the unit, madly revolving and then assuming the semblance of a skull, wire-frame structures were first built on the computer; their appearance was later refined through the application of color, shading and textural effects. The scene in the outdoor passage involving the hapless pussy is the product of highly complex procedures, the final result consisting of the progressive integration of three different versions of the same basic image. The first contains no particles and merely shows what happens to the cat; the second still contains no particles but adds to the incident the wire-frame skull; the third incorporates all the graphic elements included in the first two but with the crucial addition of particle-based gushes of steam and the softening effect of shading programs. A detailed analysis of the scene's construction — such as the one

supplied by the Region 2 (Japan version) DVD documentary — helps us better appreciate its subtlety. One realizes that the preparatory phases, though immensely sophisticated in themselves, are somewhat stark and non-atmospheric compared to the final product. Paradoxically, it is the completed version that fully conveys the farcical violence of the episode, although chromatically and graphically it is the softest and most watercolor-like.

Tremendous care also went into the animation of the dangerously hot curry sauce as it is scooped onto the plate. A large number of digitally painted images was deployed in order to evoke a vivid sense not only of the dish's semigelatinous and gooey qualities but also, most remarkably, of its incandescent aliveness: the viewer can actually sense, synaesthetically, its quintessential heat. This brief but memorable scene constitutes an admirable implementation of texture mapping, the digital procedure whereby a texture can be poured, so to speak, over an abstract CG structure — in this specific case, a fractal accretion of pebble-like objects.

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In 2003, Miyazaki created a video commercial for *Hausu* ("House"),[6] a large company dealing in both nutrition-related products and all aspects of real estate from house hunting and purchase to removal services, and the official sponsors of *The Cat Returns*. The commercial magically manages to encapsulate in a mere 81 seconds of screen time many of the most salient traits of Miyazaki's style and imagery. The video opens with a scene showing two little girls at play in an idyllically simple front garden, in the company of a yapping puppy and surrounded by lovingly depicted plants, flowers and grass, which culminates in the shot of one of the girls proffering a blossom-filled bowl to the audience. Both the mood and the characterization are overtly reminiscent of *Totoro*. The visual connection with the 1988 production is sustained by the cut to a shot of a house explicitly based on Mei and Satsuki's country home whose glowing windows in the night, combined with the echo of jolly laughter in the background, help the image exude a pervasive sense of conviviality and homeyness.

The parallel with *Totoro* is further reinforced, as the video progresses to the next scene, by the appearance of a vehicle reminiscent of the truck in which the Kusakabe family reach their new home. However, the setting has now shifted gears, showing cobbled streets flanked by elegant buildings that directly recall the key locations of *Kiki*, as indeed do a passing car and various urban props. The tone moves back to a more intimate register as a little girl is seen carrying a bag full of vegetables down a sunlit street. A further tonal and atmospheric transition is proposed as the setting changes to a rural — or at least pleasantly suburban — road, displaying distinctively Japanese flora and an old-fashioned bike just like Kanta's (from *Totoro*) as the most prominent vehicle. The scene finally cuts to a group of children engrossed in a skipping-rope routine, while the closing image displays once more the *Totoro*–based house with the company's logo superimposed over it.

While the thematic motifs presented in earlier Ghibli productions that also occur in the *Hausu* commercial are worthy of attention, no less vital are its stylistic and technical characteristics. In keeping with the studio's commitment to the communication

of an incontrovertibly two-dimensional look, the characters are portrayed so as to emphasize their eminently hand-drawn nature. Yet, the environment they inhabit is convincingly and satisfyingly three-dimensional and scrupulously texture mapped so as to convey a feeling of solidity and substance, even as the gentle palette employed for the background paintings brings to mind the exquisite lightness of pastel-colored drawings.

The felicitous use of music, characteristic of all of Miyazaki's major productions, is also observable in this clip, the warmly deep male voice performing the accompanying lyrics perfectly complementing its visuals.

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Thank You, Mr. Lasseter (Lasseter-San, Arigatou, 2003) was originally planned and produced as Studio Ghibli's expression of gratitude in the form of a "personal video letter" to John Lasseter, who had handled the English dub of *Spirited Away* with Kirk Wise and acted — in Miyazaki's own words — as a "human bulldozer" in eliminating all possible obstacles that stood in the way of the film's launch in the U.S. and Canada.

Lasseter is a founding member of the CGI giant Pixar Animation Studios — with Steve Jobs (of Apple fame), Ed Catmull and Loren Carpenter — as well as the company's current executive vice-president. His achievements to date in a directing capacity include the epoch-making *Tin Toy* (1988), *Toy Story* (1995), *A Bug's Life* (1998) and *Toy Story 2* (1999). He has also acted as executive producer for *Monsters Inc.* (dir. Peter Docter, 2001), *Finding Nemo* (dir. Andrew Stanton, 2003) and *The Incredibles* (dir. Brad Bird, 2004). His return to the director's chair will be marked by the forthcoming feature *Cars*. (Lasseter's involvement in this production, incidentally, has made it impossible for him to take over the direction of the English version of *Howl's Moving Castle*, leaving Peter Docter to face the challenge instead.) Under Lasseter's supervision, Pixar's productions (both features and shorts) have been the recipients of numerous awards, as well as many critical accolades. *Tin Toy* was the first digitally animated production to receive an Academy Award (for Best Animated Short Film), while *Toy Story* had an Academy Award nomination for Best Original Screenplay and gained Lasseter a Special Achievement Oscar. In 2004, the director was honored with the Outstanding Contribution to Cinematic Imagery prize dispensed by the Art Directors Guild, as well as an honorary degree awarded by the American Film Institute.

In 1979 Lasseter graduated from the California Institute for the Arts, where he attended a character animation program taught by the most illustrious Disney veterans and moved on to work at Disney as an animator for the following five years. Here he had his first experience of CGI and instantly saw a precious opportunity for developing his creativity in new directions and for taking the art of animation into virgin territory. Before co-founding Pixar in 1986, Lasseter had been employed by the Computer Division of Lucasfilm Ltd, where he digitally animated a ground-breaking sequence for Barry Levinson's *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1985) in which a medieval knight depicted in a stained-glass window suddenly springs to life to terrorize a priest.

Lasseter first met Miyazaki in 1982 in the U.S., where the Japanese director was at the time conducting background research for the animated film *Little Nemo* (a project

he abandoned before its completion). In the same year, Lasseter first saw *The Castle of Cagliostro*, and his devotion to Miyazaki's work — unflinching ever since — hence found inception. Lasseter later visited Miyazaki in Japan with his family. The documentary could be said to offer, above all else, a cheerfully touching account of a close friendship that has been evolving over a number of years, and of which Lasseter's efforts on behalf of *Spirited Away* constitute the most recent but by no means the sole — and hopefully not the last either — manifestation.

Thank You, Mr. Lasseter documents the trip to North America taken by several Studio Ghibli staff in 2002 in order to promote the Academy Award winner, and often exhibits the spontaneous and intimate mood of a home movie as it follows Lasseter, Miyazaki, Suzuki and others over the eventful days of the campaign. Among some of the most informative segments included in the footage are video recordings of meetings devoted to the planning of the promotional activities to follow and conversations about specific animation styles and techniques used by both Studio Ghibli and Lasseter's Pixar.

Miyazaki's first destination was the Toronto Film Festival (September 7–9), where the premiere screening of *Spirited Away* was combined with a gruelling promotional schedule, requiring the director to give 41 interviews over a very limited period of time. This seemingly never-ending procession of press junket activities was conducted in dark hotel rooms packed with state-of-the-art equipment. Miyazaki did not attend the premiere — indeed, he customarily excuses himself from such events on the grounds that he has already seen his own films often enough, though the actual reason (according to Suzuki) is that the director is "very shy" and cannot bear to see his "mistakes" in public, let alone "the audience's reactions" to them. (One could easily argue that Miyazaki is not merely being timid on these occasions but also inordinately modest.)

Miyazaki and his team next moved to L.A., where the premiere of *Spirited Away* was held at the prestigious El Capitan theatre on September 10. An exhibition devoted entirely to the movie in the context of Studio Ghibli's overall output was staged in the building's basement. In its coverage of this specific event, the documentary offers a memorably amusing anecdote. Among the exhibits was a photo-portrait of Miyazaki framed in black and flanked by two large bunches of flowers. As it happens, this is precisely the fashion in which the image of the departed is displayed and honored at Japanese funerals. Although Lasseter found this totally unintentional faux pas rather embarrassing, Miyazaki himself deemed the whole incident extremely funny: he "joked about it and made everybody laugh ... he enjoys *cultural gaps* like this." (Miyazaki's picture was quite felicitously replaced by Chihiro's.) In the course of the speech accompanying the L.A. premiere, Miyazaki jocularly alluded to the nature of animation as an assortment of sleight-of-hand tricks by comparing himself to the character of Kamaji, and then adding that "actually ... plenty of our [Studio Ghibli's] animators ... have six arms."

A visit to Walt Disney Studios was undertaken on September 11: Disney treated their Japanese guests to a welcome lunch but tastefully refrained from throwing a sumptuous party. A larger number of executives than one would normally expect to see at such an event attended the lunch — which bears witness to the studio's earnest commitment to the

U.S. future of *Spirited Away*— and emphasized repeatedly how 'honored' they all felt by the presence on their premises of the Ghibli team. The San Francisco Bay area was the party's next destination (September 12), followed by an extensive tour of Pixar Animation Studios (September 13), where the vast glass-ceilinged atrium was adorned with massive *Spirited Away* banners hanging from the rafters, which Lasseter had had Disney make to measure. "It's Miyazaki Day at Pixar," Lasseter proudly announced upon welcoming the Ghibli team to his professional home. This was Miyazaki's first visit to the new Pixar edifice, and the documentary stresses that he loved it, specifically appreciating Lasseter's determination to allow the site to develop from inside out so that it would reflect the personalities and predilections of Pixar's people. At the studio, the Japanese party thanked Lasseter for his mammoth efforts in the promotion of *Spirited Away* by means of a surprise screening of the short animation *Mei and the Kittenbus*, which Lasseter had previously seen at the Ghibli Museum in Mitaka and positively cherished. In return, Miyazaki was presented with a painting executed by a Pixar animator representing the famous bus stop scene from *My Neighbor Totoro* (Lasseter's very favorite) in which the characters of Satsuki and Mei are facetiously replaced by the two central creatures from Monsters Inc.

On the evening of September 13, the party drove to Lasseter's home in Sonoma, where the Ghibli people lavished upon their guests a veritable cornucopia of artifacts inspired by their productions — including a unique model of the *Spirited Away* bath house lovingly rendered down to its tiniest detail. (No Miyazaki fan could conceivably survive this shot without a torrentially watering mouth.) The following day saw a trip to an airfield for a joyride aboard a *Porco Rosso*–inspired scarlet biplane, a trip to a winery culminating in a spot of wine-tasting and a visit to the Lasseter family property, where Miyazaki met not only John's parents but also a massive tree reminiscent of *Totoro's* King of the Forest! The day was crowned by a comical motor race involving the American director and his wife Nancy. Following the video's coverage of these various activities, one gets an unforgettable sense of the genuine pleasure that Miyazaki derives from the contemplation of nature in its multifarious manifestations, from a single bunch of grapes to acre upon acre of verdant land, as well as a vivid impression of the refreshingly childlike enthusiasm he feels towards all manner of machines — preferably old-fashioned and hand-finished ones.

On the final day, a screening in support of the charity benefit for the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation was held at Pixar and accompanied by a bounteous reception, at the end of which Miyazaki autographed legion books, pictures and t-shirts based on his films. In the course of the event, the Ghibli team also introduced the man whose daughter putatively inspired the creation of Chihiro — with no dearth of jokes pertaining to the incomparable grotesqueness of porcine metamorphosis.

One of the key points underscored by Lasseter in the course of the documentary is the distinctive importance of *Spirited Away* in cinematic history as a film which, while using digital technology extensively, has the welcome potential for rekindling interest in — and commitment to — hand-drawn cel animation. Indeed, the director firmly believes that although digital animation will undoubtedly continue to grow, it will never totally supplant hand-drawn animation because as there are stylistic effects and thematic components for which computers are simply inappropriate. What is most intrigu-

ing, in this regard, is that such a comment should come from the head of Pixar, namely the studio automatically associated with computer-generated 3D animation at its most sophisticated, sensational and innovative. Pixar carries the torch in the developing world of CGI, benefiting — as Oliver Burkeman observes — from the possession of "one of the 10 most powerful computers in the world," the Renderfarm, which is responsible for "taking the millions of equations that the studio's animators have created to control each character, and crunching them down into individual frames of film" (Burkeman 2004).

It can take many hours to render a frame featuring a character — such as Sullivan in *Monsters Inc.* — that is endowed with millions of "individually animated strands of body hair," and whole days to handle "the effect of sunlight through water" so splendidly portrayed in *Finding Nemo*. Nevertheless, Pixar senior executive Randy Nelson emphasizes that "[n]o amount of good technology can turn a bad story into a good story." Hence, as Burkeman stresses, Pixar remains faithful to the notion that a "quasi-religious focus should be kept on characters and story," that technological expertise should be "relegated to second place" and "the importance of traditional drawing techniques ... impressed upon everybody" — hence, the establishment of "Pixar University, an in-house animation school ... at which all employees are allowed to spend several hours a week" (Burkeman 2004).

Although Ghibli's and Pixar's methodologies differ substantially, both studios generally share an aversion to the typically Disneyesque saccharine ending. In Lasseter's *Toy Story,* for instance, the resolution is clouded by the awareness that new toys will always go on being introduced into the existing enclave and thus threaten the status of the old ones. Stanton's *Finding Nemo* is also open-ended: the protagonist's misadventure is mirthfully resolved but is just an infinitesimal part of a long learning-curve and more daunting experiences are bound to beset the little fish (and, by implication, all the young creatures Nemo metonymically stands for). Bird's *The Incredibles* conjures up a mood of quasi–Nietzschean intensity in its treatment of the uneasy relationship between highly gifted and presumably ordinary people. Moreover, it openly flouts the narrow definition of animation as kids' stuff by foregrounding the harsher realities of life and even having a few peripheral characters perish. The problem, arguably, is that unlike Lasseter, Bird cannot quite refrain, in the end, from conclusive messages that verge on propaganda. The film's closing affirmation of a status quo predicated upon the uncompromising enforcement of law and order by the toughest of means reverberates with rather sinister echoes in the context of early 21st century global politics, and especially in light of the film's theatrical release in November 2004.

18

Howl's Moving Castle

In September 2001, Studio Ghibli announced its commitment to two new projects: a TV film to be directed by Hiroyuki Morita and a feature film to be based on Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle* and to be directed by Mamoru Hosoda. (Miyazaki is rumored to have first conceived of this feature in the course of a visit to the Strasbourg Christmas market.) The first new project materialized in the summer of 2002 as the feature film *The Cat Returns*, while the latter was abandoned due to discrepancies between the proposed director's vision and the studio's expectations. After a six-month closure intended to give Ghibli staff a chance to recover from the monumental efforts devoted to its recent productions, the studio chose to revisit the temporarily shelved project, and Miyazaki himself decided to take the reins again and return to the director's chair. The film entered production in February 2003 and was completed on August 8, 2004.

Prior to its domestic release (November 20, 2004), *Howl's Moving Castle* had already been honored with the prestigious Osella Award for Technical Excellence on September 11, 2004 at the 61st Venice Film Festival, where it had received its first international screening six days earlier in the context of a packed 1,000-capacity hall. Shortly following its theatrical debut in Japan, the film received the Audience Award at the Sitges International Film Festival on December 11, 2004, which was preceded by Miyazaki winning the Time Machine Award for lifetime achievement in the course of the festival's inaugural ceremony (December 2, 2004). In December 2004, upon confirmation of *Howl*'s prospective release throughout France on January 12, 2005 under the title of *Le Château Ambulant*, Miyazaki was awarded by the French president himself the title of Officer of Arts and Letters. In the wake of *Howl*'s success, Miyazaki received an honorary Golden Lion for career achievements at the 62nd Venice Film Festival to be held in August/September 2005 and hence became the first Japanese director — and indeed the first animation director — honored with this coveted prize.

Howl had the most extensive theatrical release ever accorded to a Japanese film, being screened simultaneously in 450 cinemas (that is, one out of six theatres nationwide). The previous record holder had been *Princess Mononoke* (exhibited on 348 screens), followed by *Spirited Away* (336 screens). On its opening weekend, the movie was seen by 1.1 million viewers and earned 1,500 million yen (approximately $14.6 million), thus setting the highest new record for a Japanese film, and it proceeded to gross

about $90 million over the following four weeks. By mid–January 2005, ticket sales had surpassed 12 million. *Howl* next opened on 237 screens in Korea on December 23, 2004, was seen by 770,000 spectators in the space of just four days (December 23–26), and instantly became the first Japanese film ever to rank first in the indigenous box office in its debut week. By February 10, 2005, *Howl* had attracted over 3 million Korean viewers and earned $18 million, thus surpassing *Shrek* as the most successful animated feature in the country's history.

A report published by *Screen International* and cited on the BBC News on January 6, 2005 indicated that *Howl* was the only non–English language movie released in 2004 to make more than $100 million in that year — which, considering that the film had only inhabited the public domain for a diminutive part of that year and over a very limited geographical area, is no mean feat. In France, *Le Château Ambulant* took the number-one box-office spot in its opening week with 345,633 spectators, surpassing Oliver Stone's *Alexander* and earning around $2.1 million just over the first weekend of its screening. The number of viewers attracted by Miyazaki's latest production is a new and stunning record for a Japanese film in France. The film was also immensely well-received, in subsequent weeks, at the *Anima* Festival (Brussels, February 3–13, 2005), at the Rotterdam International Film Festival (January 26 — February 5, 2005) and at the 4th AFM Festival (Istanbul, February 17–27, 2005).

Howl's theatrical triumph prompted Studio Ghibli to produce an unorthodox "sequel" to the movie in the guise of an exhibition entitled *Howl's Moving Castle — Big Circus Show* to be displayed at the Tokyo Museum of Contemporary Art. The event, opening in Golden Week (April 29–May 5), operates as both a means of enabling the visitor to relive the film's magic and an invitation to imagine what may befall the characters in the aftermath of the cinematic finale. In keeping with Ghibli's mission to extend the boundaries of animation, the circus brings the movie's dramatis personae to life as puppets performing a number of stunts. Their environment includes a traditional circus tent and stays faithful throughout to the spirit of circus histrionics by offering unexpected antics.

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Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle*, published in 1986, is a simultaneously light-hearted and tantalizing fantasy story that elegantly deconstructs a number of familiar fairy-tale conventions. According to Jones, the book is highly visual, and this aspect is most likely to have drawn Miyazaki to it in the first place. She also believes her characters would have instantly appealed to him: "I imagine that Miyazaki might, almost at once, have set about thinking how to draw and animate a fire demon" (quoted in Osmond 2003c). It is hard to imagine a more suitable director than Miyazaki to adapt Jones's book since the universes brought to life by the two artists throughout their careers are remarkably alike in spite of their being separated by immense cultural differences. The book *Howl's Moving Castle Roman Album* (2005) eloquently documents those affinities with reference to both stylistic traits and thematic predilections.

It is most likely, moreover, that the director would have cherished the prospect of creating a movie whose heroine is a lady of pensionable age rather than a *shoujo* or an

even younger child, as this task poses the challenge of having to conjure up an attractive character without the assistance of well-tested aesthetic and generic conventions. This central aspect of the movie will be examined in detail later in this chapter.

The book centers on Sophie, a young and exceptionally talented hat maker, whose creations appear able to endow their wearers with exactly the qualities that Sophie fantasizes about as she is working. While Sophie is busy with her hats, a moving castle comes to a halt on the outskirts of her hometown. The restless abode is reputed to belong to a wizard who "was known to amuse himself by collecting young girls and sucking the souls from them. Or, some people said he ate their hearts" (Jones 2000, pp. 11–12). Having enraged the Witch of the Waste, Sophie is turned into an old woman, and further cursed to be unable to tell anybody about it. Unwilling to show herself to her family in her decrepit state, Sophie runs away. By the time evening descends, she has reached the wandering edifice. Emboldened by age, she forces her way into the building and invites herself to stay for the night. The wizard's apprentice, Michael, is quite powerless to oppose this demanding old lady. Sophie falls asleep in front of the fire, and when she awakens, she discovers that its flames are actually a face — that of the fire demon Calcifer. Like Sophie, Calcifer labors under a curse, contractually bound to the castle's hearth without knowing how this has come to pass. The two characters strike a cunning bargain: each to discover the nature of the other's curse and put an end to it. This requires Sophie to find an excuse for going on residing at the castle. Hence, she claims the position of housekeeper, and when the wizard returns, he neither invites her to stay nor throws her out — which leaves her free to investigate how Calcifer has come to be tied to the castle.

Having already played a pivotal role in *Spirited Away*, Miyazaki's concern with the power of language to define people's identities and destinies gains fresh momentum in *Howl* on several levels. Most importantly, both Sophie and Calcifer are not only physically disabled by their entrapment in an old body and in a fireplace respectively but also, psychologically and affectively, by their inability to vocalize their predicaments. In the film, Sophie's inability to talk about the crippling spell that possesses her is most memorably conveyed through her body language, especially in the sequences where she gives vent to her simmering frustration by taking it out on dust and cobwebs with martial vehemence.

While he has pruned the thicket of Jones's multi-branched plot, Miyazaki has remained fundamentally faithful to its drift and tenor. Indeed, the film itself evinces considerable narrative complexity, leaving strands of the story open or partially open to allow viewers to complete it by recourse to their own imaginative faculties. Temporal displacements and superimpositions contribute vitally to such complexity, as does the employment of intertwined and prismatic characters whose multi-dimensionality is both increased and made problematic by their interactions. These effects can be recognized even if one does not take into account the infusion of Miyazaki's heady concoction with generous doses of two further complicating factors: split bodies and composite souls.

A few deviations from the source text are worth considering in the present context. There are arguably three major divergences between the book and the film. Firstly,

it should be noted that in Jones's novel, the wizard's reputation as a heart-eater — which from a distance gives him the dubious credentials of a standard fairy-tale ogre but on closer inspection amounts to mindless philandering — does not result from choice but from Howl's subjection to a mighty spell. We learn that he has given up his own heart in order to save a falling star from certain death, thereby giving birth to the fire demon Calcifer, and it is precisely the lack of the seat of sincere emotion that compels him to wander helplessly from woman to woman, unable to feel anything other than the desire to make them fall for him and then get on with the business of ridding himself of their attentions. Paradoxically, it is generosity that has made the wizard proverbially ungenerous. Yet, the character comes across as rather shallow and self-obsessed, though often captivatingly so, throughout the bulk of the narrative.

Howl is portrayed as a substantially less flamboyant and capricious figure in Miyazaki's production. Iconographically, he projects himself as an angel and a demon in equal measures. His commitment to the annihilation of deadly weapons in the guise of a grim bird of prey, vampirically fanged, covered with metallic plumage and equipped with intimidating talons, vividly conveys the gravity of his intent and actions. A deep strain of sadness, combining feelings of exhaustion, disenchantment and even self-contempt, courses through his hatred of warfare and his inability, nonetheless, to disengage himself from the conflict. Those emotions are most effectively conveyed by the shots in which Howl catches occasional glimpses of the sleeping Sophie in her young configuration, his own vexation graphically heightened by the spectacle of her comely innocence.

In order to comprehend why exactly Howl takes part in military action even though he would rather have nothing to do with it, it is crucial to recognize that the film posits his role as exterminator as a crucial component of the curse under which he toils. This also explains why, by extricating the wizard from his bane through the power of love, Sophie concurrently dispels his bird-like incarnation. (The sequence, it is worth noting, is reminiscent of the climactic moment in *Spirited Away* where Chihiro likewise unshackles Haku from Yu-Baaba's spell by reviving his memory of his original identity, thereby also dissolving his dragon-like persona.) The blood Howl sheds in his ornithological incarnation is disturbingly palpable: though he may be a wizard and hence capable of amazing self-healing feats, he is nonetheless alive and made of ultimately vulnerable flesh.

Secondly, in the movie the Witch of the Waste is not — as she is in the book — depicted as an unredeemable fiend but is actually returned to human form, and her humanity is indeed underscored by the animation's emphasis on a disabling sense of frailty. The character is ultimately accorded positive attributes — primarily the ability to empathize, in her own idiosyncratic fashion, with the heroine's predicament — and even though she retains elements of her initial penchant for self-indulgence and covetousness, she is finally capable of acting selflessly. At the same time, Miyazaki typically eschews the spirit of revenge: Sophie ultimately shelters and feeds the witch once the latter has returned to the state of a haggard and inoffensive old woman. Miyazaki also departs from Jones's depiction of the witch in terms of visual representation. While

Jones's text describes her as "carefully beautiful" (p. 30) and tastefully — if grandly — garbed, the film portrays her as an obese crone done up in matronly glamor wear. (The witch's sartorial gaudiness is echoed, incidentally, by Howl's own predilection for glam-rocker accoutrements, most notably the harlequin coat.)

Thirdly — and most arrestingly as far as animation techniques are concerned — Sophie is not, in the film, depicted as an entirely ancient-looking woman as a result of the witch's curse. In fact, she is never, within the main body of the cinematic narrative, uniformly and incontrovertibly presented as either young or old. Miyazaki has succeeded in lucidly conveying this potentially mystifying idea by recourse to constant and sometimes almost imperceptible fluctuations in the heroine's countenance and movements and thus delivered, both graphically and psychologically, one of the most complex and satisfying accomplishments in Studio Ghibli's entire history.

Miyazaki's depiction of the distinctive physiognomic and psychological markers of Sophie's age evolved gradually, the director taking carefully into consideration the diverse opinions voiced by his team's younger staff. As producer Toshio Suzuki has stated, "he wasn't sure ... whether it was okay for a popular entertainment movie to have a 90-year-old woman at its center from beginning to end. So he would bring it up at a meeting and a female staff member would respond by saying: 'What's wrong with having a grandma as the heroine? I think it's a great idea.' And then another female staffer would say: 'It might be nice to see her back in a girl's body every now and then.' Those exchanges really inspired Miya-san's imagination" (quoted in Hagiwara 2004a).

As subtle facial adjustments and bodily modulations evoke the impression that Sophie is neither 18 nor 90 but actually several ages at once, glimpses of the young Sophie fluidly infiltrate the images of her prematurely aged self. In some of the most tantalizing sequences, the heroine retains the overall markers of a grizzled woman, yet is concurrently endowed with a fresh complexion and limber body, while in others, her latent youthfulness is subtly hinted at by the presence of a longer and thicker braid than the one normally associated with the fully timeworn persona. When, at the end, Sophie regains her initial age, she nonetheless preserves the white hair. This stylistic decision could be read as a symbolic reminder, on Miyazaki's part, that the past is ultimately indelible and that even though baleful spells may be broken and evil vanquished, the traces of past experiences live on. In this regard, *Howl*'s message constitutes a powerful elaboration of the lesson previously communicated by *Spirited Away*.

Other differences between the novel and its cinematic adaptation are noticeable at the levels of plot and character development. For instance, in the novel, Sophie first encounters Howl, without any inkling of his actual identity, in a busy market square on May Day. The wizard approaches the heroine and offers to buy her a drink, but she timidly declines the invitation. Gallantly, he lets her go and the two characters do not meet again until after Sophie has been turned into an old woman and has forcibly installed herself in the castle.

In the film, events unfold quite differently: Sophie, already daunted by her hectic surroundings, is harassed by soldiers during a military parade (note how the war theme is already fore grounded in the film's early sequences) and is hence succored by Howl.

Ominous beings endowed with blob-like heads and bodies, sprawling limbs, the texture of oozing tar and — with marvelous incongruity — straw skimmers threaten the wizard and his protégée, compelling Howl to turn the sleeves of his gaudy coat into improvised airplane wings and soar above the bustling crowd. The creatures, having craftily leaked into the crevices between flagstones in the form of twirling slugs (still equipped with miniature hats!), relate the incident to the Witch of the Waste, and it is on the basis of this report that, out of jealousy, she morphs Sophie into a hag.

On the animation plane, the rescue-and-escape sequence offers a scintillating rendition of body language. The characters' balletic flight over the rooftops to the beat of Joe Hisaishi's elating waltz, is reminiscent of both the pursuit sequence presented in the opening part of *The Castle of Cagliostro* and Kiki's broom-powered excursions over Koriko. These two Miyazakian antecedents indeed capture the principal components of the wizard's character as a roguish gentleman and charming sorcerer.

A further divergence between the book and the film is the representation of the mute and bouncing scarecrow Turnip: a terrifying — though ultimately innocuous — presence in the novel, the creature operates as a crucial source of support for Sophie throughout the film. The scarecrow's body language, somewhat reminiscent of the style of motion exhibited by the hopping lamppost in *Spirited Away*, is especially remarkable because it succeeds in conveying a vivid sense of dance-like grace despite the character's extremely limited number of limbs and even more limited flexibility. The figure of the scarecrow contributes some of the most touching, if apparently inconsequential, notes to *Howl*'s action — for instance, in the rain-drenched scene (reminiscent of *My Neighbor Totoro*) in which it offers an umbrella to the disconsolate Sophie, as well as providing the heroine a walking stick equipped with a bird's head whose bright eyes and crooked beak resemble Sophie's own.

In the novel, Suliman is a benevolent Royal Wizard victimized by the Witch of the Waste in her pursuit of absolute power (which she is perfectly prepared to achieve, with Frankensteinian gusto, by synthesizing crucial components of her enemies' bodies and minds). In the film, conversely, Suliman is a Royal Witch who appears to have total control over the actual monarch, and passes herself off as an enlightened ruler full of wisdom and magnanimity but, in fact, is essentially a sadist who derives enormous pleasure from fuelling discord and forcing her visitors to climb a gigantic staircase in order to reach the throne.

The canine characters presented in the two versions of the story also evince considerable dissimilarities. In Jones's novel, the dog is portrayed as a wild creature, freed by Sophie when she finds it trapped in a thorny edge early in the narrative, and subsequently turns out to be a young man trapped in one of the Witch of the Waste's most powerful and inhumane spells. In Miyazaki's film, by contrast, Heen — having escaped the perfidious Madam Suliman — plays a pivotal part throughout in the role of Sophie's sidekick. The wheezing and aging animal has given Miyazaki a precious opportunity to flaunt his masterful comprehension of animal movement, Heen's body language as he hops about to attract Sophie's attention providing one of the film's most genial visual refrains.

Finally, it is worth noting that whereas in the novel Howl's apprentice is a 15-year old boy, in the film (where he is renamed Markl) he is depicted as a five-year-old child who regularly adopts the guise of a bushy-bearded midget by means of an enchanted costume in order to pass himself off as a reputable (and appropriately outlandish) magician. Arguably, this modification has the advantage, for the director, of providing occasions for the playful type of animation to be found in *Totoro* — especially in the character of Mei — and hence of yielding the comic relief necessary to counterbalance the horrific spectacle of the war sequences.

Throughout the film, the audience is consistently discouraged from taking appearances at face value and urged instead to accept the existence of discrepancies between people's physiques and their personalities. Hence, Miyazaki intimates that the notion of a unified identity is no more than a vapid humanist fantasy fuelled by the unwarranted claims of anthropocentrism. Sophie herself combines the semblance of the hag with a crooked nose (which one would conventionally associate with evil sorceresses) and characteristics of popular heroines immortalized by animations based on fairy-tale and fantasy: the blue dress and white apron, for instance, instantly bring to mind Disney's Alice (as does the image of Sophie tumbling down a hole in the meadow to enter an alternate dimension), whereas the protagonist's earnest battle against dust and cobwebs is vividly reminiscent of Snow White's analogous approach to her hosts' untidy dwelling.

Occasionally, the film departs from its source of inspiration at points in the narrative which would have struck the director as ideal opportunities for the evocation of scenes most consonant with his own thematic and graphic preferences, even if these were merely hinted at in the original. It is noteworthy, in this respect, that among the most distinctive traits of the established Miyazaki signature given prominence in *Howl* are multifarious manifestations of flight. Indeed, as the *Roman Album* demonstrates, to Jones's original scenario Miyazaki has characteristically added a vast artillery of flying machines reminiscent of those depicted in *Laputa*, as well as floating vehicles akin to those presented in *Porco Rosso*. The dragonfly-like Aero-Kayak undoubtedly ranks high among Studio Ghibli's most inspired aeronautical extravaganzas, reminding us that in Miyazaki's cosmos, machines are capable of flying as one does in dreams — namely, unfettered by either gravity or gear.

No less central are multiple metamorphoses that throw overtly into relief the ubiquity of flux. Reality appears ever-changing and pervaded by multifarious spirits — as awesomely attested to by *Totoro*, *Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*. Relatedly, the identities of the central characters are emphatically unanchored: Sophie possesses the appearance of an ancient woman yet remains inherently young, the scarecrow is actually a spell-bound prince, and Howl is able to morph into both a bird and the king's double. Furthermore, the wizard has a knack of swapping names no less flamboyantly than physical appearances, "Howl" being interchangeable with "Mr. Jenkins" and "Mr. Pendragon" as alternative denominations, depending on context and occasion.

At the same time, as argued in further detail later in this chapter, the film offers an unflinching exposure of the futility of war and of the iniquity of attendant totalitarian

regimes, a sensitive reflection on the effects of both economic and psychological forms of exploitation, and a typically Miyazakian dramatization of journeys of self-exploration and self-empowerment. Where this last theme is concerned, the heroine's quest for identity is most affectingly dramatized, at the sheer level of the movie's animation techniques, by a climb up the steep mountain that will eventually lead her to the castle — her puniness magnified by the sublime vastness of her surroundings — and, later, by her arduous negotiation of an ostensibly interminable flight of stairs. The latter, as Mark Schilling has noted, is strongly suggestive of "Dante's ascent to Purgatory" (Schilling 2004).

A young woman's romantic and erotic awakening is often depicted as a magical land in its own right in numerous *manga* and *animé* (though sometimes in dubiously tasteful pornographic terms). In Miyazaki's films, this demographic has risen to an especially prominent status. What is unique about *Howl* is Sophie's struggle with age shifts that are both touchingly and harrowingly suggestive of Multiple Personality Disorder. Above all, however, the heroine has to muster the courage to do what needs to be done not merely in the pursuit of self-realization but also, more importantly, in accordance with a sense of interpersonal responsibility. In this respect, even though *Howl* is originally a Western story, the protagonist's task strikes ethical chords of an eminently Japanese orientation in prioritizing the principles of group affiliation, loyalty and obligation to others. To the cumulative worth of these interrelated qualities, Sophie's conduct adds a generous dose of that ensemble of virtues which the Japanese language designates as *yasashisa* — kindness, compassion, sensitivity.

On the technical plane, Miyazaki's handling of the animation of the heroine's facial expressions and overall body language works most effectively in conveying her vacillation between moments of self-assurance bolstered by a gutsy determination on the one hand, and moments of self-doubt and dejection on the other. A paradigmatic illustration is supplied by the gothic sequence (reminiscent of the nightmare segment of *Whisper of the Heart*) in which Sophie wrangles with contrasting sensations as she picks up a blood-stained feather shed by Howl upon his return from battle, and enters the wizard's room — now transformed by the slumbering brain into an ominous tunnel at the bottom of which a giant bird writhes in agony. The sequence owes much of its pathos to Miyazaki's rendering of Sophie's reactions as a subtle mix of inquisitiveness and utter horror. At the same time, it deliberately blurs the boundary between the actual and the dreamlike, suggesting that while portions of the action really occur, others unfold exclusively within the cavernous chambers of the unconscious.

Miyazaki's model sheets and production designs also evince a deep aversion to black-and-white characterization, as persuasively borne out by the books *The Art of Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) and *Howl's Moving Castle Roman Album*. In Miyazaki's preliminary sketches, Howl alternately comes across as vain, impatient and conceited on the one hand, and as capable of sincere affection and altruism on the other. Sophie, likewise, evinces the *yasashii* attributes (sensitivity, kindness) to be found in the female protagonists of numerous Miyazaki productions, yet is concurrently portrayed as resolute, capable of becoming incensed and determined to stand up to Howl regardless of his wizardly powers. Calcifer, for his part, though presented as unequivocally demonic

in the parent text, is ambivalently depicted by Miyazaki. While perfectly capable of showing a diabolical face, he nonetheless exhibits an element of cuteness that brings to mind *Spirited Away*'s *susuwatari*. The designs (included in the *Album*) illustrating the animation processes through which the fire demon was incrementally endowed with apparent limbs and a tongue akin to a chameleon's, enabling him to reach into the frying pan and to lick its contents rank among Studio Ghibli's most stunning achievements in the artistic department, not least due to their knack of communicating an uncanny admixture of evanescence and substantiality.

Howl brings into play and ingeniously maximizes virtually all of the major animation techniques already deployed to stupendous effect in previous Ghibli productions. Like *Totoro*, for instance, it frequently uses elongation in the passing position between two key frames in order to invest the action with a smoothly realistic pattern of motion, while also employing anticipation, accents and takes with extraordinary dexterity. Like *Laputa*, moreover, it offers a deftly handled alternation of slow-paced sequences and headlong dives, poised elegance and hyperdynamism, as well as audacious camera angles and depth-of-field effects intended to propose daring juxtapositions of depth and height. Like both *Kiki* and *Spirited Away*, finally, *Howl* makes masterful use of walks as a means of individualizing its characters at the levels of age, status, and mood, manipulating weight and flexibility to evoke shifts and fluctuations in both individual and relational modalities of motion.[1]

Like *Spirited Away*, *Howl* was produced digitally, which means that instead of cels, the animators used high-resolution frames recorded to high-capacity digital tape and then transferred onto film. Like both *Princess Mononoke* and *Spirited Away*, moreover, *Howl* uses a number of computerized tools and techniques, including digital composition and layering, 3D rendering, morphing, particles systems, texture mapping, digital painting, ray tracing and computer-generated atmospheric effects. (These are described in detail in the chapters devoted to the two earlier productions.) Importantly, however, the film represents another primary example of Studio Ghibli's spellbinding integration of traditional animation and CGI: all of its backgrounds were, initially, hand-drawn and hand-painted, while its characters were hand-drawn and only subsequently scanned digitally, instead of being actually generated in the computer. The effectiveness of this approach is vividly summarized by Schilling's assessment of the movie's animation techniques:

> Hollywood has buried 2D feature animation, with the incredible success of Pixar's *The Incredibles* [$7 million box-office takings over its opening weekend] ... putting a seal on the tomb, so to speak.... *Howl* is ... a powerful counterargument to the "2D is dead" crowd ... no 3D wizard has surpassed Miyazaki's technical mastery of the animator's art, from the lush, vibrant beauty of his landscapes to the way he makes the smallest movement and gesture come alive. In Miyazaki's world, even the way the heroine sews artificial berries onto a hand band expresses character and mood [Schilling 2004].

Miyazaki's judicious use of CGI — and related determination never to relinquish his commitment to hands-on craftsmanship — is clearly borne out by *Howl's* morphing sequences. The sequence in which the witch transforms Sophie into an old woman, in

particular, does not resort to the obvious morphing strategies to which Western animation has accustomed its audiences. In fact, it seeks to convey discreetly the mounting sense of disbelief, shock and ultimately horror experienced by the protagonist as she comes to comprehend the magnitude of her predicament. Accordingly, it does not show the transformation as such but rather its aftermath — most effectively, in the shots where Sophie beholds, successively, her wizened hands and face. Her expression here echoes Chihiro's reaction to the sight of her parents' bizarre transformation.

A further instance of elegantly managed morphing can be found in the sequence where Howl, having warded off one of Suliman's mightiest spells, metamorphoses into his bird-like persona. The transformation is very gradual, its initial indicator consisting just of the sprouting of talons from the hand that holds onto Sophie — to which she reacts with equal doses of curiosity and dismay — followed by the spreading of plumage to the rest of the magician's body. At times, Howl's metamorphosis is only partial — for example, in the scene where he repels a particularly vicious bombing raid. In this case, the left forearm alone is affected by the appearance of embryonic feathers, arranged in a visually disturbing pattern. The effect here evoked brings to mind Ashitaka's otherworldly wound in *Mononoke*.

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Both Jones's novel and Miyazaki's movie strike a balance between action and romance, frequently utilizing humor (in the guises of irony and sarcasm no less than in those of overt comedy or even farce) as the adhesive agent capable of holding the two halves together. Some of the more overtly theatrical sequences, where an element of operatic exaggeration is deliberately introduced so as to throw into relief Howl's penchant for self-dramatization, come across as somewhat Wagnerian in their peculiar mélange of emotionalism, heroics and sheer noise. Importantly, however, Miyazaki does not pander to the distinctively Wagnerian ethos based on romanticized idealizations of mythology and a specious passion for epic grandeur. In fact, the wizard's obsession with his self-image — its construction, punctilious maintenance and style-conscious enhancement — is not so much a pretext for spectacle as a means of exploring the predicament of a cursed character. In the basic logic of Jones's plot, the curse in question is a product of magic. Yet, on the allegorical level implied by the film, that same motif alludes to the fate of both individuals and whole communities beset by war, exploitation and abuse, as well as the psycho-economic repercussions of the commercial fetishization of glamor.

At one point, the wizard chillingly states that if we are not beautiful, there is no point in our being alive. Thus, just as *Spirited Away* offers a critique of consumerism conducted with reference to the entertainment and leisure industries, *Howl* could be read as an indictment of that same cultural trend elaborated with reference to the "Beauty Myth." A humorous twist is added to this central message by the semi-melodramatic scene in which Howl comes to be engulfed in a deluge of green slime due to a bout of tearful depression occasioned by his customary hair dye playing a nasty trick on its user. The scene constitutes one of the most momentous instances of

Miyazaki's exuberant engagement with the genius of the bizarre, while also recalling Chihiro's handling of the putrid river spirit in *Spirited Away*.

A mobile ensemble of puffing and shuddering scrap iron, replete with rickety footbridges, miniature cottages, peculiar turrets, wheels, cogs, concealed staircases, prehistoric wings, bird-like feet and an irreverently lolling tongue, Howl's castle mirrors the magician's own propensity for the eccentric and the sensational, shifting location in defiance of physics and logic and opening at will onto disparate worlds and temporal dimensions. David Rooney has captured most effectively the building's eccentricity by describing it as "something out of Monty Python via Hieronymus Bosch" (Rooney 2004), while Eddie Shannon has seen it as "one of Terry Gilliam's wildest animations crossed with some kind of crazy Victorian-era invention. Each part of the bizarre structure seems to move independently" (Shannon 2004). The castle's idiosyncratic patterns of motion, moreover, recall the sculptures of the Swiss kinetic artist Jean Tinguely.

The dissection of the maquette presented in the *Album* indicates that the basic physical structure (later translated into digital objects) incorporated at least 80 main elements — not to mention peripheral adjuncts. The castle, moreover, changes shape several times in response to explosions and reassemblies caused by diverse incidents, at one point being reduced to a raft-like platform, yet regaining its full bulk at the end with the addition of vegetation reminiscent of the floating island from *Laputa*. In virtue of its graphic emphasis on the composite and the entangled, the architectural approach adopted by Miyazaki in the creation of the building could be said to epitomize on a truly monumental scale the spirit of the story in its entirety as a huge jigsaw puzzle wherein identities are swapped, lovers mistaken and destinies entangled.

As for the broader setting, whereas Jones used the Welsh moorlands as her main source of inspiration, Miyazaki and his art department drew most of their imagery from a French region endowed with a quintessentially fairy-tale flavor: Alsace. Jones herself did not believe that Studio Ghibli would gain much from visiting the sorts of locations which its members originally had in mind: "I tried to dissuade them from going to Cardiff, and suggested that a smaller Welsh town would be better" (quoted in Osmond 2003c). Eventually, Miyazaki personally visited the Alsatian towns of Colmar and Riquewihr and studied closely both their traditional architecture and their rural surroundings. The creative shift from Wales to Alsace is illustrated by the *Album* with reference to photographs of both regions in their contemporary conformations.

The animation techniques deployed in *Howl* demonstrate a commitment to the individualization — even personalization, in fact — of each aspect of the setting, from the most homely to the most palatially grandiose, from the most idyllic to the most ominous. The reflections of the sun in serene streams and rivers (to be consistently seen as the titular castle journeys across the land), the delicate flowers, verdant meadows, snow-capped mountains (suggestive of *Heidi*) and picturesque clouds, as well as the elegant urban scenarios akin to *Kiki*'s decor, are effectively juxtaposed with foreboding images of narrow alleys infested by amorphous ghouls, masked knaves and crawling mutants, fierce battle sequences and portentous storms, alongside graphic explosions of the monstrous and the grotesque.

Miyazaki's ability to integrate seamlessly the gorgeous and the repulsive is attested to by the shots focusing on Howl's bathroom — the portion of the castle to which the wizard's obsession with his appearance compels him to spend a substantial amount of time. An ostensibly foul assortment of cosmetic residues, the space nonetheless manages to recall, by virtue of its palette and Impressionist feel, the gentle sublimity of Claude Monet's lily ponds.

In order to enhance the French flavor of the film's setting, Miyazaki's team also turned to the works of the illustrator, chronicler, historian, satirist and — above all — visionary Albert Robida (1848–1926), drawing inspiration from his fantastic speculations about the future of technology. (Although Robida is far less renowned than his contemporary and rival Jules Verne, it is noteworthy that his predictions concerning the development of 20th-century media are more accurate than many of Verne's own musings.) The visionary element is indeed pivotal to the worldview promulgated by *Howl*. Like *Laputa*, the 2004 production harks back to the 19th-century and chooses to represent that period not in and for itself but with reference to its imaginary projections onto the future.

Hence, the film concurrently visualizes actual elements of 19th-century culture and society, and images of later epochs as envisioned at the time. Suzuki has discussed at some length this aspect of Miyazaki's latest movie and noted that when Miyazaki was "wondering what period the movie should be set in," he came up with the 19th-century for the principal reason that he was fascinated with the many artists who "drew 'illusion art' in Europe back then.... They drew many pictures imagining what the 20th-century would be like. They were illusions and were never realized after all." The spell-binding power of such images, for Miyazaki, resides in their ability to conjure up "a world in which science exists as well as magic, since they are illusion," and in which conventional boundaries separating the rational from the irrational, the measurable from the incommensurable, and fact from fantasy are, consequently, radically undermined (Suzuki 2002).

Miyazaki's imaginary 19th-century unfolds in tandem with a no less imaginary version of Europe. As in *Cagliostro* and *Kiki*, this is the kind of idealized world that the Japanese designate as *akogare no Paris* ("the Paris of our dreams").[2] Nevertheless, this world is also rendered tangibly convincing by the director's commitment to the study and representation of architectural and ornamental details, costumes and vehicles characteristic of certain portions of 19th-century Europe. The *Album* documents this aspect of the movie, showing that even though Miyazaki's Europe may constitute a fictional universe, it is by no means an undiluted idyll: not only is the land scourged by war, its skies are also besmirched by the smoke-belching chimneys of burgeoning proto-industrial conglomerates.

Howl's most overtly magical sequences rely on mesmerizing settings that shine forth as vintage Miyazaki. The first of such sequences pivots on the Witch of the Waste's domestication by Suliman's superior sorcery. Eerie lights emanating from peculiar vessels worthy of the most dexterous alchemist of old are seen to coalesce into 2D origami-like figures that then proceed to revolve in a carousel pattern around the helpless victim

of the charm in a feat of dazzling choreography. The second explicitly magical sequence takes place in the throne room: the moment the Royal Witch taps the floor with her bedeviled staff, a star-studded hollow suggestive of an inverted sky appears in the ground. As the ordinary relationship between the earth and the heavens is flouted, a flood of biblical proportions overwhelms the location, unleashing an aquatic symphony of kaleidoscopically varied hues and shapes.

The last sequence in which the film reveals most openly Miyazaki's staunch commitment to spellbinding effects is the essentially wordless one in which Howl's life is fading fast as Calcifer lies, pallid and frightened, in the hands of the subdued but still acquisitive Witch of the Waste, and Sophie endeavors to fathom at last the mystery of the wizard's and the fire demon's predicaments so as to save them both. The sequence symbolically dramatizes the novel's proposition that the reason for which Howl is enslaved to malevolent magic is that he has surrendered his heart in order to aid a dying star — and thus created Calcifer — and that his existence has hence been inextricable from the demon's fate along the dire lines of a Faustian pact. Sophie's Carrollian descent into a parallel universe discloses a concomitantly alluring and menacing landscape imbued in hypnotically shifting palettes, from which the heroine emerges equipped with the knowledge necessary to replenish the wizard's being.

While assessing Miyazaki's approach to a fundamentally Western fairy tale, it is also important to identify the extent to which *Howl* also reverberates with echoes of the Japanese fairy-tale heritage. As Hayao Kawai emphasizes in his seminal text *The Japanese Psyche: Major Motifs in Fairytales of Japan*, a key topos in that tradition consists of the notion of interpenetrating worlds: that is to say, quotidian realms, non-everyday domains and liminal dimensions between them, across which characters may migrate either of their own volition or as a corollary of spells. *Howl*'s prismatic geography paradigmatically exemplifies this motif. As to why Miyazaki may have found this particular aspect of Jones's novel especially appealing (which is suggested by the care he put into bringing it to cinematic life), it is worth citing Kawai's own hypotheses regarding Japanese perceptions of coexisting realities:

> One of the characteristics of the Japanese people is the absence of a clear distinction between exterior and interior world ... the wall between this world and the other world is ... a surprisingly thin one. That the membrane between inner and outer or this and that world is paper-thin like a *fusuma* (sliding room-divider) or *shoji* (a paper door-window) reflects the nature of the Japanese ego [Kawai 1988, p. 103].

This widespread cultural attitude is deemed by Kawai to be largely indebted to the *Hua-yen* school of Buddhism, according to which "nothing in the world exists independently of others. Everything depends for its phenomenal existence upon everything else.... Thus the universe in this vista is a tightly structured nexus of multifariously and manifoldly interrelated ontological events, so that even the slightest change in the tiniest part cannot but affect all the other parts" (Kawai 1988, p. 33).

Another recurring fairy-tale theme discussed by Kawai that is deeply relevant to *Howl*'s plot is that of the disappearing female. In Miyazaki's movie, as in Jones's story,

this is dramatized through Sophie's departure from her home in the aftermath of her metamorphosis. For Kawai, the image of the woman who vanishes in silence and grief "symbolizes the need to bring something new to ... culture. To pursue the woman who disappears sorrowfully from this world and then comes back again is therefore a worthwhile and necessary task" (Kawai 1988, p. 25). Sophie's regenerative agency in freeing Calcifer and Howl from the magical binds that constrain them, rejuvenating herself and redeeming the Witch of the Waste, attest to the invigorating powers attributed by Kawai to that traditional figure of Japanese fairy tales.

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While Jones's novel merely alludes to the protagonist's country, Ingary, being under threat from neighboring realms, Miyazaki's *Howl* makes war one of its pivotal themes. Devastating conflagrations fill the screen, while sinister battleships and mammoth zeppelin bombers unremittingly torture the battered environment, supposedly dropping "intelligent bombs" capable of annihilating entire conurbations. Protean creatures, weirdly at odds with the landscape's more dreamily Alsatian traits, haunt the towns, emerging like dark ectoplasms from fissures in the walls to slither relentlessly towards their iniquitous ends in the service of a callous regime. Suzuki has commented on the use made by *Howl* of the theme of warfare and of a related atmosphere of ubiquitous anxiety and strife: "When we were making it, there was the Iraq war. In Japan we were not in a very good economic situation. From young to old, people are not very happy" (quoted in Darlington 2004). At the time of the film's first international screening, the director of the 2004 Venice Biennale, Marco Muller, described *Howl* as "possibly the strongest anti-war statement we have in the entire festival" (quoted in Darlington 2004).

Suzuki has also stressed that one of Miyazaki's central preoccupations was the extent to which the theme of war could be reconciled with the tale's romantic strand, because in a world ravaged by utterly unscrupulous conflicts it is "very hard to be in love." People who might experience mutual attraction would also have to face the question "which side should I stand for in the war?," which might — yet, just as feasibly, might not — contribute to strengthen their feelings. In addressing this issue, Suzuki has also drawn an interesting parallel between *Howl* and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004), a film he had co-produced. According to Suzuki, while Miyazaki is fundamentally interested in exploring the qualities that make people human and enable them to retain their humanity in a world brutalized by bloodshed and greed, Oshii is eager to address the friction between contrasting definitions of the human condition as a simultaneously material and spiritual state. As the producer explains, in *Innocence*, "a woman who lost her own body and a man who is almost entirely machine ... fall in love with each other, facing the problem of their own identity" (Suzuki 2002). Thus, despite obvious thematic and stylistic differences, both movies engage in thorough investigations of the collision of war and love, of collective and personal conflicts, and of the viability of constructive emotions in a destructive environment.[3]

Retaining the imaginative ebullience of *Spirited Away*, *Howl* is undeniably more somber than its immediate Miyazakian predecessor. The closing scene's romantic mood

and blue skies may seem to usher in an optimistic disposition, but they can hardly be regarded as conclusively reparative. The audience is simply not allowed to indulge in this moment of harmony and somehow suppress or repress the troubling images of ruination and blinding acrimony that have marked several of the film's most dramatic sequences. As with *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, it could be argued that *Howl*'s ending is not unproblematically auspicious for the sheer reason that it does not deliver any automatic guarantees of either peace or prosperity for future generations of humans (and indeed other creatures). Thus, the finale serves to amplify, ironically, the omnipresent sense of darkness that permeates the main body of the narrative.

More disturbing still is the fact that in dramatizing the magician's successful attempts at vanquishing the military machinery, *Howl* highlights the non-human nature of the goopy creatures that drive it, while at the same time unsentimentally exposing the fate of real human troops and civilians in the raided towns. Thus, even as the film conveys a pacifist message it does not pander to utopianism. The war issue ultimately remains open-ended. Madam Suliman puts an end to the war for the most cogent, if also the most disarmingly plain, reason: namely, the fact that war is idiotic. The virtual ruler's eventual decision to terminate the conflict is indubitably felicitous and makes it possible for the film to end under the canopy of a joyfully fair sky, yet it is made to appear quite sudden and arbitrary. This is a way of suggesting that the very opposite choice — the decision to start a war — could just as simply be made at any point in time, no less unexpectedly and no less capriciously.

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Just as Chihiro frees Haku from the spell that holds him captive through the power of love, so Sophie rescues both Howl and Calcifer by the same magically simple means. Such elementary concepts rise to the status of sheer phantasmagoria in Miyazaki's hands because as the director is capable of fully appreciating and dramatizing the unsurpassable power of simplicity as a "condition," in T.S. Eliot's words, "costing no less than everything" (*Little Gidding*).

As Miyazaki's most recent accomplishment and as something of a compendium of the most salient features and preoccupations evinced by his entire opus to date, *Howl* vividly encapsulates the definition of the art of animation put forward by James Clarke:

> one of the most compelling aspects of animation is its power to remind audiences of the importance of play and imagination in a world that increasingly sidelines such necessities ... animation is one of the most popular forms in which the spirit of true anarchy and the antic spirit live on. In Native American mythology, the coyote figure is a central force, playfully and willfully at odds with the established order that it seeks to mock and undermine. Animation plays this same coyote-like role.... It is a liberating force that free associates like crazy and makes audiences see the world afresh and, clichéd though it sounds, with the eyes of a child again [Clarke 2004, pp. 1–2].

Postscript: French Connections — The Miyazaki/Moebius Exhibition

Every adult is a grown-up child but very few of them remember it.
— Miyazaki, Miyazaki/Moebius 2004

The release of *Howl's Moving Castle* in France January 12, 2005 was one of the principal motivating factors behind the decision taken by Buena Vista International (which was responsible for the movie's distribution in that country) to promote Miyazaki's works by means of a cutting-edge exhibition. In light of Miyazaki's and Moebius's mutual esteem and influences, it seemed appropriate to pair the two artists. On the one hand, it was felt that this connection would be bound to attract the general public to a greater degree than an event devoted exclusively to the Japanese animator could be expected to do, given Moebius's tremendous popularity throughout Europe and indeed the West. On the other, Miyazaki himself, due to his amply documented reserve, would not have been willing to be the sole object of attention outside his native country. Hence, the decision to stage a comparative exhibition felicitously fulfilled more than one function in a single movement.

Co-founder of (with Jean-Pierre Dionnet, 1975) and contributor to the French sci-fi comics magazine *Métal Hurlant, Moebius* (Jean Giraud) is best known in the film world for his work in the capacities of set designer and creature developer on *Dune* (dir. Alexandro Jodorowsky, 1975); *Alien* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1979); *Heavy Metal* (dir. Gerald Potterton, 1981); *Tron* (dir. Steven Lisberger, 1982); *Les Maîtres du temps* (dir. René Laloux, 1982); *Masters of the Universe* (dir. Gary Goddard, 1986); *Willow* (dir. Ron Howard, 1988); *The Abyss* (dir. James Cameron, 1989); *Little Nemo* (dirs. William T. Hurz and Masami Hata, 1991)[1]; Space Jam (dir. Joe Pytka, 1996); and *The Fifth Element* (dir. Luc Besson, 1997).

Moebius first discovered Miyazaki's work in 1986, when his son Julien (then a schoolboy) showed him a pirate copy of a video containing a titleless, authorless and undubbed animated feature. The French artist was instantly seduced by the film's graphic vigor and technical inventiveness but took it to be the one-off accomplishment of an unfamed animator. When he eventually discovered that the movie in question was entitled *Nausicaä*

of the Valley of the Wind and that its creator's name was Hayao Miyazaki, Moebius endeavored to delve deeper into the Japanese animator's oeuver and to publicly voice his admiration. Eloquent testimony to the intensity of this feeling is supplied, incidentally, by the fact that Moebius's own daughter was named Nausicaä after Miyazaki's heroine. In 1987, the French artist me the director in Japan and found out that Miyazaki had already been familiar with his work for several years. The encounter also alerted the two artists to the existence of intriguing connections between their respective outputs. This preliminary contact led to a second trip to Japan undertaken in the 1990s in the course of which Moebius had opportunity to visit Studio Ghibli and meet producer Toshio Suzuki.

The exhibition (*La Monnaie de Paris*, December 1, 2004–March 13, 2005) offered a panoramic survey of the two artists' careers through 300 works including watercolors, storyboards, cels and concept designs, thematically arranged, drawn from their personal collections. These culminated with a reciprocal homage consisting of a portrait of Nausicaä by Moebius and one of Arzach (one of the French artist's best known characters) by Miyazaki.

The two artists' ecological concerns were emphasized in the section devoted to "The Nourishing Earth," where Miyazaki's tentacular vegetation was featured alongside Moebius's mineral landscapes. Attention was drawn to their shared celebration of biodiversity and related approach to nature as a holistic entity wherein each form — down to a mere pebble or even a monocellular organism — is endowed with life and sentience.

Their attraction to the sky was documented in the context of the room entitled "In the Air" with reference to Miyazaki's legendary representations of flight and flying machines and to Moebius's excursions into cosmic space, with an emphasis on their common quest for imaginary territories and for the freedom which these may yield.

The section dedicated to "Invisible Worlds" illustrated the origins of ancestral mystical beliefs as conceived of by the two artists. The animistic spirit world (Miyazaki) and the realm of the unseen (Moebius) likewise appear to function as forces capable of guiding their characters' learning trajectories and of stimulating human consciousness with shamanic intensity.

The room centered on "Creatures" juxtaposed humanized bestiaries and animalized humans. Hybrids play key roles in both Miyazaki's and Moebius's works. Moreover, fantastic beings, such as the water creature designed by Moebius for Cameron's *The Abyss* and Miyazaki's Calcifer (*Howl*), consistently ear witness to a shared desire to experiment with animation techniques in the service of the representation of figures that carry symbolic connotations of a simultaneously mythical and ideological nature.

The final room, "Study," painstakingly documented the gradual evolution of sketches, concept drawings and model sheets into definitive cels and frames, enabling the viewer to grasp the incrementally self-redefining and self-enriching flavor of the two artists' graphic prowess.

Besides their artistic value, some works on display vaunted the additional quality of literally reaching out towards the visitor by virtue of their lived materiality. Indeed, one could palpably sense the artist's agency not merely behind but also inside the drawing of sketch thanks to visible smudges, scratches, fingerprints and incomplete erasures.

One of the exhibition's main strengths, cumulatively, was its ability to show that in both Miyazaki's and Moebius's experiences creative development has consistently been understood as an ongoing, open-ended process, commodiously amenable to change as the prerequisite for self-renewal. Relatedly, it attested to the unsurpassable importance of multicultural exchanges as a vital means of enhancing and artist's vision, of energizing the individual imagination and concurrently influencing global tastes and perceptions of a medium and of its distinctiveness. On a broader level, the event demonstrated that fandom is not merely a matter of Internet chat rooms — where the participants often appear unwilling or unable to move beyond the discussion of a character's hair color — but actually encompasses opportunities for artistic cross-pollination and a resulting inauguration of novel visions and aims.

The exhibition did not constitute a historic event only for Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli — though it undoubtedly contributed significantly to the dissemination of their works outside Japan — but also for the world of animation in general. This is because the initiative audaciously prompted and fostered recognition of the artistic status of animation and its legitimate integration in the ivory tower of the museological universe. The housing of the enterprise in one of the most sumptuous and architecturally imposing Parisian palaces overlooking the Sein effectively confirmed the organizers' intention to elicit proper appreciation of the exhibits' artistic caliber. It should also be noted, in this regard, that the venue befittingly enhanced the viewing experience by complementing the works and providing the ideal itinerary for an exploration of the two artists by experts and amateurs alike.

The legacy of the Miyazaki/Moebius exhibition, finally, is an inspired invitation to acknowledge the existence of vital links between Miyazaki's cinema and other sectors of the animation and art worlds. Relatedly, it can help us grasp the significance of media synergy in contemporary culture as a fundamentally ubiquitous and wide-ranging phenomenon that cannot be patronizingly dismissed as an exclusively market-driven mutation of film-based motifs and characters into ancillary products.

Epilogue

[A] person will ... do his duty, not slavishly, not because he fears social opprobrium or the penalties of the law, but cheerfully and without any sense of strain, because it seems the natural and the most satisfying thing to do; he will ... thus exhibit the quality of moral grace.... There are occasions, all too common in human experience, when the performance of one's duty necessarily entails sacrifice and suffering ... times of crisis, when duty and inclination clash and a hard and bitter choice must be made.... In the face of hostile circumstances and evil fate, man's last refuge is that inward freedom of the soul which makes him independent of chance and change in the material world.... At such moments moral grace gives way to the sublime.

—William Witte, from his inroduction to
Friedrich von Schiller's *Maria Stuart* (1965)

Frequently dubbed "the Disney of the East," Studio Ghibli is actually believed by many to surpass contemporary Disney animation, if not in terms of technical excellence, arguably in narrative substance, thematic complexity and mythmaking flair. As Noy Thrupkaew has noted, "there's little the two [Disney and Ghibli] have in common save their popularity and the ubiquity of their marketing. For one thing, Miyazaki is idiosyncratic, fond of nonlinear plotting and visual flights of fancy. And where the Mouse House has a tendency to swap sweetness for saccharine, to simplify the tangled and to lighten the dark, Miyazaki rarely indulges in such tendencies" (Thrupkaew 2002). Mark Schilling has likewise remarked on radical dissimilarities separating the Japanese director's output from the standard fare of Western animation: "none of his contemporaries can equal the richness, depth and strangeness of his imagination. Whereas the imaginative flights of Hollywood animators are nearly all in the service of character and plot, Miyazaki allows his mind and pencil to wander where they will, into the realm of pure flight or the bizarre world of dreams, where logic takes a holiday and meaning speaks from every stone" (Schilling 2004). Nor does Miyazaki pander — no less importantly — to the *eroguro* (erotic-grotesque) side of *animé*, for even though his films repeatedly reflect upon the power of Eros by engaging with both budding and adult sexualities, and certainly do not shy away from the grotesque, they do not couple the two elements merely in that pursuit of titillation which much commercial *animé* has appeared to prioritize.[1]

Moreover, in talking about Ghibli as the "Japanese Disney," and appreciating the only partial accuracy of the comparison, it must also be stressed that whereas Disney still tends to be associated with the individual figure of Walt Disney as an artist and showman and hence with his personal, ground-breaking intervention in the world of animation, Studio Ghibli is a fundamentally corporate entity of which Miyazaki may be considered a key component but by no means the sole driving force.[2]

What is most distinctive about Studio Ghibli's productions is that they do not abide by the stereotypical notion that animated films are kids' stuff but persistently tackle social, philosophical and psychological issues of considerable gravity. These range from the conflicts spawned by the uneasy coexistence of human technology, the spiritual realm and the natural environment, to the vicissitudes of personal enculturement and socialization. These recurring concerns are time and again brought together by the realization that the deeply embedded incompatibilities that afflict the relationship between the worlds of humans and the worlds of spirits must always acknowledge the presence of nature as the dimension that invariably suffers the direst repercussions of their discord. Yet it remains vital to the existential definition of both parties at war, for both are limited, and human beings, in particular, are "only a small species among the many that inhabit this planet" (Miyazaki quoted in Whipple 1992).

Accordingly, where Western animation cultivates the ethos of anthropocentrism by inventing creatures such as living toys, dancing tableware, lion kings and talking insects, Miyazaki's movies transport the viewer into a parallel reality where neither man nor his humanist certainties could conceivably constitute the center of the universe. Even when the non-human realm is ostensibly humanized — i.e. by recourse to talking animals or to sentient plants and rocks — what guides the narrative is not a desire to domesticate the environment but rather a deep feeling of empathy with all natural forms, predicated upon a steadfast belief in their inherent aliveness and consciousness. Indeed, in Japanese culture — and especially in the elements thereof that are most overtly inspired by Buddhism — even inanimate objects are respected, if not on the grounds of their awareness, certainly on those of their specific usefulness: a quality for which they should be gratefully revered and remembered. For example, blunted or otherwise damaged needles have traditionally been accorded a memorial ceremony intended to acknowledge their loyal services.

The conceptual scope of Miyazaki's films, moreover, is marked by a resistance to stark binary oppositions at the level of character presentation, whereby the heroes/heroines and their antagonists are never neatly apportioned to the stereotypical categories of good and evil but are each shown to harbor both virtues and flaws. No less vitally, Miyazaki further eschews the conventional yoking together of animation and infantilism by proclaiming and adamantly respecting the wisdom of children. Hence, his works do not presume to legislate over what sorts of themes and imagery young audiences may or may not be able to handle. In fact, they aim for their heads in the hope of providing insights into some of the ways in which both children and adults come to accept and negotiate reality's least yielding facets.

The sheer breadth of Miyazaki's frame of reference contributes vitally to his features' appeal and growing popularity the world over. Drawing on a variety of literary

and visual sources of Western provenance, the director concurrently turns to Japan's lore and pictographic imagination for inspiration and actually manages, by virtue of his distinctive themes, to transcend the boundaries of both Occidental and Oriental traditions and to tackle concerns of global relevance and cross-cultural magnitude.

The blossoming attraction of productions such as the ones enumerated above, demonstrated by screening decisions at international festivals and in mainstream Western theatres, may partly be due to the public's enduring demand for old genres — fantasy, action-adventure, romance and horror, to mention but a few — and concurrent desire to see them articulated in relatively unfamiliar forms and formats. At the same time, the influence of Eastern cinema can be seen in Western productions such as Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* movies (2003–2004) and the Wachowski brothers' *Matrix* trilogy (1999–2003), where references to myriad aspects of both animated and live-action films of Oriental origin can be detected. The West's attraction to Eastern cinema and, in particular, to its handling of traditional codes and conventions could also be regarded as symptomatic of a deeply ingrained tendency of capitalist dispensations: namely, a passion for novelty paradoxically coexisting at all times with a yearning for stability and constancy. The latter repeatedly manifests itself precisely in the form of a nostalgic fascination with the old, the antique and even the downright obsolete.

A panoramic survey of Miyazaki's opus from *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) to *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) holds the advantage of documenting the ways in which the director and his studio have elaborated and varied their take on particular themes in both narrative and technical terms over the years. However, it should be borne in mind that Miyazaki's cinema has developed in a fundamentally accretional fashion — in much the same manner as a coral reef does — and not in the service of a teleological program aimed at formulating a definitive statement about either the human condition or the fate of the planet, let alone the future of animation as an art. Thus, the director's output goes on constituting a case of work in progress regardless of the aesthetic completeness and conceptual self-consistency of individual movies. In an interview for *Time*, Miyazaki has indeed stated: "What's thrilling for me is to break down my own style, to destroy expectations of what a movie or what animation should be" (quoted in Takeuchi Cullen 2001).[3]

Whether or not *Howl* is Miyazaki's last production in a directing capacity, his corpus remains open-ended. This is a corollary of the director's unremitting awareness of the ultimately unanswerable status of the key question that his films seek to address: namely, "What is a life?" A portion of a citation offered in the chapter devoted to *Nausicaä* is here worthy of reiteration: "I couldn't help but to ask the question of what a life is, the question I knew from the beginning I couldn't answer" (Miyazaki 1994). The question is resistant to conclusive ripostes for the reason, arguably, that it is not really *a* question but rather a bundle of inextricably intertwined conundrums. This rapidly becomes obvious if one assesses the different implications it carries, depending on where the stress is placed. "*What* is a life?" alludes to an epistemological notion of essence; "what *is* a life?" to the issue of ontological definition; "what is *a* life?" to the relationship between individual and collective states of being; and "what is a *life*?" to fundamentally semantic speculations.

Though unwilling to dish out neatly packaged parcels of meaning, Miyazaki nonetheless stresses the necessity — for virtually all of his protagonists and for many of his villains as well — to internalize the principle of loyalty and the germane values of respect, honor and memory through often laborious odysseys that afford no room for ready-made epiphanies. As Patrick Drazen emphasizes, loyalty is a culturally specific value invested with unparalleled prominence in Japanese society, because every social grouping is based on its entitlement to devotion from its members: "Even in the face of modernization, group membership is a major part of one's life in Japanese society." [Drazen 2003, p. 28].

It is for this reason that Japanese narratives, even at their most violent and gory, show an aversion to "vendettas for their own sake." Indeed, such acts "are motivated by personal feelings rather than clan loyalty ... and thus tend to disrupt social harmony" (Drazen 2003 p. 43).

In Miyazaki's movies, the culturally specific significance of loyalty is implied, yet it is never so pronounced as to become utterly context-bound. In fact, the films are greatly popular outside Japan precisely because they are able to communicate with disarming frankness the global relevance of the tenets they explore. They do so, primarily, by emphasizing that none of the values mentioned above ultimately means anything unless each is underpinned by self-awareness and self-scrutiny — namely, an acknowledgment of one's capabilities, limitations and situation in a network of reciprocal obligations. Hence, Miyazaki's characters must develop — on the basis of a critical understanding of who they themselves are and might become — the ability to respect and honor others and their environment, and to recognize that behaving loyally towards them inevitably requires personal exertions. These entail a willingness to engage in a dispassionately thorough assessment of the past and to grasp the cautionary and redeeming import of the recollections it activates. As Zeniba tells Sen in a climactic scene in *Spirited Away*, it is up to the young heroine to fathom her situation unsentimentally if she is to rescue those she loves from their dismal predicaments: no deus ex machina can be expected to assist her. Drawing on her own — dormant and largely unacknowledged — memories has a crucial role to play in the process: "you'll have to help your parents and Haku *on your own*. Use what you remember about them.... Once you've met someone, you never really forget them. It just takes a while for your memories to return."

In this respect, *Spirited Away* could be regarded as a candidly explicit dramatization of an idea that is actually latent in all of Miyazaki's productions. Its most optimistic message lies with its celebration of the power of love to reinvigorate a person's submerged identity through caring reminiscences no less than through the confrontation of physical danger. When the greed and hunger for power inherent in exploitative and callously materialistic dispensations rob their subjects of self-knowledge — as graphically illustrated by Yu-Baaba's tampering with both Chihiro's and Haku's names — identities are engulfed in a simmering darkness that only selfless devotion to others, and a brave effort to recuperate one's buried memories, may successfully dissipate and replace with an enlightening energy. This message is also conveyed by *Spirited Away*'s theme song "Always with Me."[4]

Memory, Miyazaki warns us, is too often careless, allowing spiritual values to vanish beneath the glitz and neon of consumerism. However, treasuring the past should never become tantamount to wallowing in simple-minded nostalgia, for the inevitable transience of things must be accepted and imaginatively negotiated. What ought not to be allowed to sink into oblivion, therefore, is not the content of the past per se but rather the awareness of its having occurred and of the ineluctability of its passing. The past's legacy lies in its no-longerness and in its missingness no less than in its enduring hold as a concurrently individual and cultural burden.[5] Miyazaki's approach to the past ultimately shuns nostalgia in favor of what could be described as a commitment to continuity or, better still, continuity-in-discontinuity: that is to say, an appreciation of the elusive guises in which vestigial traces of the past manage to find extension into the present and into the future.

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Filmography

****Designates works discussed in some detail in this book.*

Hayao Miyazaki's Roles in Pre-Ghibli Productions

Watchdog Woof-Woof (*Wan Wan Chushingura*)
1963. Feature Film. Miyazaki: In-between Animation

Wolf Boy Ken (*Ookami Shounen Ken*)
November 25, 1963–August 16, 1965. TV Series. Miyazaki: In-between Animation

Boy Ninja: Fujimaru the Wind (*Shounen Ninja Kaze no Fujimaru*)
June 7, 1964–August 31, 1965. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation (unknown episodes)

Gulliver's Space Travels (*Garibaa no Uchuu Ryokou*)***
1965. Feature Film. Miyazaki: In-between Animation

Hustle Punch (*Hassuru Panchi*)
November 1, 1965–April 24, 1966. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation (unknown episodes)

Rainbow Warrior Robin (*Reinbou Sentai Robin*)
April 23, 1966–March 24, 1967. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation (episodes # 34 & 38)

Little Witch Sally (*Mahoutsukai Sarii*)
December 5, 1966–December 30, 1968. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation (episodes # 77 & 80)

The Adventures of Hols, Prince of the Sun*** or, ***Little Norse Prince Valiant*** (*Taiyou no Ouji — Horusu no Daibouken*)
1968. Feature Film. Miyazaki: Scene Designer; Key Animation

Puss in Boots (*Nagagutsu wo Haita Neko*)***
1969. Feature Film

The Flying Ghost Ship (*Soratobu Yuurei-sen*)***
1969. Feature Film. Miyazaki: Key Animation

Akko-chan's Secret (*Himitsu no Akko-chan*)
January 6, 1969–October 26, 1970. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation (episodes # 44 & 61)

Moomin (*Muumin*)
October 5, 1969–December 27, 1970. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation (episode # 23)

Animal Treasure Island (*Doubutsu Takarajima*)***
1971. Feature Film. Miyazaki: Key Animation; Idea Organization

Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves (*Aribaba to 40-ppiki no Touzoku*)***
1971. Feature Film. Miyazaki: Key Animation

Pippi Longstockings (*Nagakutsushita no Pippi*)
1971. Reached only the pre-production stage. Miyazaki: Imageboards

Monkey-Style Jumper Ecchan (*Sarutobi Ecchan*)
October 4, 1971–March 27, 1972. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation (episode # 6)

Lupin III (*Rupan Sansei*)
October 24, 1971–March 26, 1972. TV Series. Miyazaki: Co-Director (with Takahata)

Panda! Go, Panda!
or, ***The Adventures of Panda and Friends*** (*Panda Kopanda*)***
1972. Short Film. Miyazaki: Concept; Screenplay; Set Design; Key Animation

Red-armored Suzunosuke (*Akadou Suzunosuke*)
April 5, 1972–March 28, 1973. TV Series. Miyazaki: Storyboard (episodes # 26 & 27)

Yuki's Sun (*Yuki no Taiyou*)
1972. Pilot film for TV. Miyazaki: Key Animation

Panda and Child: Rainy Day Circus (*Panda Kopanda—Amefuri Saakasu no Maki*)
1973. Short Film. Miyazaki: Screenplay; Art Design; Scene Design; Key Animation

Wilderness Boy Isamu (*Kouya no Shounen Isamu*)
April 4, 1973–March 27, 1974. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation (episode # 15)

Samurai Giants (*Samurai Jaiantsu*)
October 7, 1973–September 15, 1974. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation (episode # 1)

Heidi, Girl of the Alps (*Arupusu no Shoujo Haiji*)***
January 6, 1974–December 29, 1974. TV Series. Miyazaki: Scene Design; Scene Organization

A Dog of Flanders (*Furandaasu no Inu*)***
January 5, 1975–December 28, 1975. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation (episode # 15)

Three Thousand Miles in Search of Mother (*Haha wo Tazunete Sanzen-Ri*)***
January 4, 1976–December 26, 1976. TV Series. Miyazaki: Scene Design; Scene Organization

Rascal the Raccoon (*Araiguma Rasukaru*)***
January 2, 1977–December 25, 1977. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation

Conan, Boy of the Future (*Mirai Shounen Konan*)***
April 4, 1978–October 31, 1978. TV Series. Miyazaki: Director; Character, Mechanical and Scene Design; Storyboards

Anne of Green Gables (*Akage no An*)***
January 7, 1979–December 30, 1979. TV Series. Miyazaki: Scene Design and Layout

Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro (*Rupan Sansei—Kariosutoro no Shiro*)***
1979. Feature Film. Miyazaki: Director; Screenplay

Lupin III: Albatross Wings of Death (*Rupan Sansei [Shin]—Shi no Tsubasa Arubatorosu)*
July 21, 1980. TV Series episode # 145. Miyazaki: Director; Screenplay; Storyboard (under pseudonym "Telecom")

Lupin III: Farewell, Beloved Lupin (*Rupan Sansei [Shin]—Saraba Itoshiki Rupan Yo*)
September 29, 1980. TV Series episode # 155. Miyazaki: Director; Screenplay; Storyboard (under pseudonym "Telecom")

New Adventures of Gigantor (*Tetsujin 28 Go [Shin]*)
October 3, 1980–September 25, 1981. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation

Sherlock Hound or, ***Great Detective Holmes*** (*Meitantei Houmuzu*)***
November 6, 1984–May 20, 1985. TV Series. Miyazaki: Director

Zorro (*Kaiketsu Zoro*)
Never actually released in Japan. TV Series. Miyazaki: Key Animation

Space Adventure Cobra (*Kobura*)
1982. Feature Film. Miyazaki: Key Animation

Hayao Miyazaki's Feature Films: Nausicaä *and the Studio Ghibli Era—1984–2004*

Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (1984)

A Joint Production of Tokuma Shoten and Hakuhoudou. *Original Title: Kaze no Tani no Naushika*; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Original Story:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Screenplay:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Producer:* Isao Takahata; *Executive Producers:* Yasuyoshi Tokuma, Michio Kondou; *Music:* Joe Hisaishi; *Running Time:* 117 minutes; *Production Period:* May 1983–March 1984; *Number of Cels:* 56,078; *Release:* March 11, 1984; *Animation Director:* Kazuo Komatsubara; *Art Director:* Mitsuki Nakamura; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yasuda; *Sound Director:* Shigeharu Shiba.

Japanese Voice Cast: Nausicaä, Sumi Shimamoto; *Yupa,* Gorou Naya; *Kushana*, Yoshiko Sakakibara;

Asbel, Youji Matsuda; *Kurotawa*, Iemasa Kayumi; *Mito*, Ichirou Nagai; *Mayor of Pejite*, Makoto Terada; *Lastelle*, Miina Tominaga; *Lastelle's Mother*, Akiko Tsuboi; *Jihl*, Mahito Tsujimura; *Oh-Baba*, Hisako Kyouda.

English Voice Cast (Walt Disney Home Video 2004): Nausicaä, Alison Lohman; *Yupa*, Patrick Stewart; *Kushana*, Uma Thurman; *Asbel*, Shia LaBeouf; *Kurotawa*, Chris Sarandon; *Mito*, Edward James Olmos; *Mayor of Pejite*, Mark Hamill; *Lastelle*, Emily Bauer; *Lastelle's Mother*, Jodi Benson; *Peasant Girl*, Ashley Rose Orr.

Awards: Commendation by WWF (World Wildlife Fund). Mainichi Movie Contest: Ofuji Award. Seventh Place; Japanese Films; Kinema Junpo Best 10. First Place; Readers' Choice; Kinema Junpo Best 10. Kinema Junpou Japanese Movie Director Prize. First Place; Japanese Films; Zenkoku Eiren. First Place; 14th International SF & Fantasy Festival. Encouragement Prize for Excellent Film Production; Agency for Cultural Affairs. Second Place; Pia Ten (Best Films of the Year). Best Animé; 7th Animé Grand Prix. Grand Prix of Animation; 2nd Japanese Animé Festival

Laputa: Castle in the Sky (1986)

A Studio Ghibli Production. *Original Title: Tenkuu no Shiro Rapyuta*; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Original Story:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Screenplay:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Producer:* Isao Takahata; *Executive Producer:* Yasuyoshi Tokuma; *Music:* Joe Hisaishi; *Running Time:* 124 minutes; *Production Period:* June 1985–July 1986; *Number of Cels:* 69,262; *Release:* August 2, 1986; *Animation Director:* Tsukasa Niwauchi; *Art Directors:* Toshiro Nozaki, Nizo Yamamoto; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yusada; *Sound Director:* Shigeharu Shiba.

Japanese Voice Cast: Pazu, Mayumi Tanaka; *Sheeta*, Keiko Yokozawa; *Muska*, Nou Terada; *Dola*, Kotoe Hatsui; *Uncle Pom*, Fujio Tokita; *General*, Ichiro Nagai; *Mentor*, Hiroshi Ito; *Okami*, Machiko Washio; *Shalulu*, Takumi Kamiyama; *Lui*, Yoshito Yasuhara; *Anli*, Sukekiyo Kameyama; *Old Engineer*, Ryuji Kai; *Madge*, Tarako.

English Voice Cast (Buena Vista Home Entertainment 2003): Pazu, James Van Der Beek; *Sheeta*, Anna Paquin; *Muska*, Mark Hamill; *Dola*, Cloris Leachman; *Uncle Pom*, Richard Dysart; *General*, Jim Cummings; *Boss*, John Hostetter; *Charles*, Michael McShane; *Louie*, Mandy Patinkin; *Henri*, Andy Dick. *Voice Direction:* Jack Fletcher.

Awards: Ofuji Award: Mainichi Movie Contest. First Place; Pia Ten (Best Films of the Year). First Place; Japanese Movies; City Road. First Place; Japanese Movies; Eiga Geijyutsu (Movie Art). First Place; Japanese Films Best 10; Osaka Film Festival. Eighth Place; Japanese Films; Kinema Junpo Best 10. Second Place; Readers' Choice; Kinema Junpo Best 10. Best Animé; 9th Animé Grand Prix. Special Recommendation; The Central Committee for Children's Welfare. Special Award (to Miyazaki & Takahata); Revival of Japanese Cinema

My Neighbor Totoro (1988)

A Studio Ghibli Production. *Original Title: Tonari no Totoro*; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Original Story:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Screenplay:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Producer:* Toru Hara; *Executive Producer:* Yasuyoshi Tokuma; *Music:* Joe Hisaishi; *Running Time:* 86 minutes; *Production Period:* April 1987–April 1988; *Number of Cels:* 48,473; *Release:* April 16, 1988; *Animation Director:* Yoshiharu Sato; *Art Director:* Kazuo Oga; *Color Design:* Nobuko Mizuta; *Sound Director:* Shigeharu Shiba.

Japanese Voice Cast: Totoro, Hitoshi Takagi; *Satsuki Kusakabe,* Noriko Hidaka; *Mei Kusakabe,* Chika Sakamoto; *Tatsuo Kusakabe,* Shigesato Itoi; *Yasuko Kusakabe,* Sumi Shimamoto; *Kanta,* Toshiyuki Amagasa; *Kanta's Grandmother,* Tanie Kitabayashi; *Kanta's Mother,* Yuuko Maruyama; *Kanta's Father,* Masashi Hirose; *Teacher,* Machiko Washio.

English Voice Cast (Fox Video 1994): Satsuki, Lisa Michaelson; *Mei,* Cheryl Chase; *Dad,* Greg Snegoff; *Kanta,* Kenneth Hartman; *Mother,* Alexandra Kenworthy; *Nanny,* Natalie Core; *Farmer,* Steve Kramer; *Farm Girl,* Lara Cody; *Kanta's Mom,* Melanie Mcqueen; *Adaptation:* Carl Macek.

Awards: Japanese Academy Awards: Best Photography

Kiki's Delivery Service (1989)

A Studio Ghibli Production. *Original Title: Majo no Takkyuubin*; *Status:* Feature Film. *Director:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Original story:* Eiko Kadono; *Screenplay:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Producer:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Executive Producers:* Yasuyoshi Tokuma, Mikihiko Tsuzuki, Morihisa Takagi; *Music:* Joe Hisaishi; *Running Time:* 102 minutes; *Production Period:* April 1988–July 1989; *Number of Cels:* 67,317; *Release:* July 29, 1989; *Animation Directors:* Shinji Otsuka, Katsuya Kondou, Yoshifumi Kondou; *Art Director:* Hiroshi Ono; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yasuda; *Sound Director:* Naoko Asari.

Japanese Voice Cast: Kiki, Minami Takayama; *Ursula,* Minami Takayama; *Jiji,* Rei Sakuma; *Kokiri,* Mieko Nobuzawa; *Osono,* Keiko Toda; *Tombo,* Kappei Yamaguchi; *Madame,* Haruko Kato; *Barsa,* Hiroko Seki.

English Voice Cast (Buena Vista Home Entertainment 2003): Kiki, Kirsten Dunst; *Ursula,* Janeane Garofalo; *Jiji,* Phil Hartman; *Tombo,* Matthew Lawrence; *Osono,* Tress MacNeille; *Barsa,* Edie McClurg; *Madame,* Debbie Reynolds; *Dad,* Jeff Bennett; *Radio Announcer,* Corey Burton; *Senior*

Witch, Debi Derryberry; *Mom,* Kath Soucie; *Ket,* Pamela Segall; *Voice Direction:* Jack Fletcher.

Awards: Best Animated Film; 44th Mainichi Film Contest. Best Japanese Film of the Year, Voted by Readers; Kinema Junpo. Special Award; Japan Academy Award. Tokyo Metropolitan Cultural Honor. 7th Annual Money Making Director's Award. Gold, Japanese Film; 7th Annual Golden Gross Award. Special Achievement Award; The Movie's Day. Special Award: The Erandole Award. Best Film and Best Director; Japan Cinema Association Award. Excellent Movie; Japanese Agency of Cultural Affairs. Best Animé; 12th Annual Animé Grand Prix

Porco Rosso (1992)

A Studio Ghibli Production. *Original Title: Kurenai no Buta*; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Original story:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Screenplay:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Producer:* Toshio Suzuki; *Executive Producers:* Yasuyoshi Tokuma, Mashuo Toshimitsu, Yoshio Sasaki; *Music:* Joe Hisaishi; *Running Time:* 102 minutes; *Production Period:* August 1991–July 1992; *Number of Cels:* 58,444; *Release:* July 20, 1992; *Animation Director:* Megumi Kagawa; *Art Director:* Katsu Hisamura; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yasuda; *Sound Director:* Naoko Asari.

Voice Cast: Marco (Porco Rosso), Shuuichirou Moriyama; *Madame Gina,* Tokiko Kato; *Mister Piccolo,* Sanshi Katsura; *Mamma Aiuto Boss,* Tsunehiko Kamijou; *Fio Piccolo,* Akemi Okamura; *Mister Donald Curtis,* Akio Outsuka; *Baa-chan,* Hiroko Seki.

Princess Mononoke (1997)

A Studio Ghibli Production. *Original Title: Mononoke Hime*; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Original story:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Screenplay:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Producer:* Toshio Suzuki; *Executive Producers:* Yasuyoshi Tokuma, Seiichiro Ujiie, Yutaka Narita; *Music:* Joe Hisaishi; *Running Time:* 135 minutes; *Production Period:* November 1995–July 1997; *Number of Cels:* 144,043; *Release:* July 12, 1997; *Animation Directors:* Masashi Andou, Kitaro Kosaka, Yoshifumi Kondou; *Art Directors:* Nizo Yamamoto, Naoya Tanaka, Yoji Takeshige, Satoshi Kuroga, Kazuo Oga; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yasuda; *Computer Graphics:* Yoshinori Sugano, Yoshiyuki Momose, Mitsunori Kataama, Masafumi Inoue; *Sound Director:* Kazuhiro Wakabayashi.

Japanese Voice Cast: Ashitaka, Yoji Matsuda; *San,* Yuriko Ishida; *Eboshi Gozen,* Yuko Tanaka; *Jiko Bou,* Kaoru Kobayashi; *Kouroku,* Masahiko Nishimura; *Gonza,* Tsunehiko Kamijo; *Toki,* Sumi Shimamoto; *Wolf,* Tetsu Watanabe; *Tatarigami,* Makoto Sato; *Ushikai,* Akira Nagoya; *Moro no Kimi,* Akihiro Miwa; *Hiisama,* Mitsuko Mori; *Okkotonushi,* Hisaya Morishige.

English Voice Cast (Miramax/Buena Vista Home Entertainment 2001): Ashitaka, Billy Crudup; *San,* Claire Danes; *Lady Eboshi,* Minnie Driver; *Jigo,* Billy Bob Thornton; *Moro the Wolf,* Gillian Anderson; *Toki,* Jada Pinkett-Smith; *Gonza,* John Di Maggio; *Kohroku,* John DeMita; *Okkoto,* Keith David.

Awards: Best Movie; The 21st Japan Academy Award. Best Japanese Movie, Best Animation, and Japanese Movie Fans' Choice; The 52nd Mainichi Movie Contest. Best Japanese Movie and Readers' Choice; Asahi Best Ten Film Festival. Excellent Movie Award; The Agency for Cultural Affairs. Grand Prize in Animation; The 1st Media Arts Festival (held by the Agency for Cultural Affairs of the Ministry of Education). Best Director; Takasaki Film Festival. Best Japanese Movie; The Association of Movie Viewing Groups. Movie Award; The 39th Mainichi Art Award. Best Director; Tokyo Sports Movie Award. Nihon Keizai Shinbun Award for Excellency. Nikkei Awards for Excellent Products/Service (details). Theater Division Award; Asahi Digital Entertainment Award. MMCA Special Award; Multimedia Grand Prix 1997. Best Director and Yujiro Ishihara Award; Nikkan Sports Movie Award. Special Achivement Award; The Movie's Day. Special Award; Houchi Movie Award. Special Award; Blue Ribbon Award. Special Award; Osaka Film Festival. Special Award; Elandore Award. Cultural Award; Fumiko Yamaji Award. Grand Prize and Special Achievement Award; Golden Gross Award. First Place, best films of the year; The 26th "Pia Ten." First Place; Japan Movie Pen Club, 1997 Best 5 Japanese Movies. First Place; 1997 Kinema Junpo Japanese Movies Best 10 (Readers' Choice). Second Place; 1997 Kinema Junpo Japanese Movies Best 10 (Critics' Choice). Best Director; 1997 Kinema Junpo Japanese Movies (Readers' Choice). First Place; Best Comicker's Award. First Place; CineFront Readers' Choice. Nagaharu Yodogawa Award; RoadShow. Best Composer and Best Album Production; 39th Japan Record Award. Excellent Award; Yomiruri Award for Film/Theatre Advertisement

Spirited Away (2001)

A Studio Ghibli Production. *Original Title: Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Original Story:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Screenplay:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Producer:* Toshio Suzuki; *Executive Producers:* Yasuyoshi Tokuma, Toshio Suzuki, Takeyoshi Matsushita, Seiichiro Ujiie, Yutaka Narita, Koji HoshinBanjiro Uemura, Hironori Aihara; *Music:* Joe Hisaishi; *Running Time:* 125 minutes; *Production Period:* December 1999–July 2001; *Number of Cels:* since the movie was produced digitally, there are no production cels but only production high-resolution

frames recorded to high-capacity digital tape and then transferred to film; *Release:* July 20, 2001. *Animation Directors:* Masashi Andou Kitaro Kosaka Megumi Kagawa; *Art Director:* Yoji Takeshige; *Associate Art Director:* Noboru Yoshida; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yasuda; *Color Design Assistants:* Kazuko Yamada, Yuki Nomura; *Director of Digital Animation:* Mitsunori Kataama; *Director of Digital Imaging:* Atsushi Okui; *Sound Director:* Kazuhiro Hayashi.

Japanese Voice Cast: Chihiro, Rumi Hiiragi; *Haku,* Miyu Irino; *Yubaba & Zeniba,* Mari Natsuki; *Kamaji,* Bunta Sugawra; *Lin,* Yuumi Tamai; *Bou,* Ryunosuke Kamiki; *Chihiro's father,* Takeshi Naitou; *Chihiro's mother,* Yasuko Sawaguchi.

English Voice Cast (Optimum Releasing 2004): Chihiro, Daveigh Chase; *Haku,* Jason Marsden; *Lin,* Susan Egan; *Chihiro's father,* Michael Chiklis; *Chihiro's mother,* Lauren Holly; *Assistant Manager,* John Ratzenberger; *Yubaba & Zeniba,* Suzanne Pleshette; *Kamaji,* David Ogden Stiers; *Boh,* Tara Strong.

Awards: Best Animated Feature Film; 75th Annual Academy Awards. Best Film; 2001 Japanese Academy Awards. Golden Bear (tied); 2002 Berlin International Film Festival. Best Animated Feature; 2002 New York Film Critics Circle Awards. Special Commendation for Achievement in Animation; 2002 Boston Society of Film Critics Awards. Best Animated Feature; 2002 Los Angeles Film Critics Awards. Outstanding Achievement in an Animated Feature Production; 2002 Annie Awards. Best Directing in an Animated Feature Production; 2002 Annie Awards. Best Writing in an Animated Feature Production; 2002 Annie Awards. Best Music in an Animated Feature Production; 2002 Annie Awards. Best Animated Feature; 2002 Critics' Choice Awards. Best Animated Feature; 2002 New York Film Critics Online Award. Best Animated Feature; 2002 Florida Film Critics Circle. Best Animated Feature; 2002 National Board of Review. Best Original Score in the Category of Comedy or Musical; 78th Annual Glaubber Awards. Motion Picture, Animated or Mixed Media; 7th Annual Golden Satellite Awards. Audience Award for Best Narrative Feature; 45th San Francisco International Film Festival. Special Mention from the Jury; 2002 Sitges Film Festival. Best Asian Film; 2002 Hong Kong Film Awards. Best Animated Film; 29th Annual Saturn Awards. Best Film (tied); Cinekid 2002 International Children's Film Festival. Best Animated Feature; Online Film Critic Society. Best Animated Feature; Dallas-Forth Worth Critics. Best Animated Film; Phoenix Film Critics Society. Silver Scream Award; 19th Amsterdam Fantastic Film Festival. Best Family/Animation Trailer; Fourth Annual Golden Trailer Awards. Brilliant Dreams Award 2003; Bulgari. Award Winner, Film; 2003 Christopher Awards. Award Winner, Most Spiritually Literate Films of 2002 (You); Spirituality & Health Awards. Best Movie for Grownups who Refuse to Grow Up, Best Movies for Grownups Awards; *AARP The Magazine*

Howl's Moving Castle (2004)

A Studio Ghibli Production. *Original Title: Hauru no Ugoku Shiro*; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Original Story:* Diana Wynne Jones; *Screenplay:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Producer:* Toshio Suzuki; *Executive Producer:* Yasuyoshi Tokuma; *Music:* Joe Hisaishi; *Running Time:* 119 minutes; *Production Period:* November 2003–August 2004; *Number of Cels:* since the movie was produced digitally, there are no production cels but only production high-resolution frames recorded to high-capacity digital tape and then transferred to film; *Release:* November 20, 2004; *Animation Director:* Katsuya Kondou; *Supervising Animators:* Akihiro Yamashita, Takeshi Inamura, Kitaro Kosaka; *Art Directors:* Yozi Takeshige, Noboru Yoshida; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yasuda; *Director of Digital Animation:* Mitsunori Kataama; *Sound Director:* Kazuhiro Hayashi; *Sound Effects:* Toru Noguchi.

Japanese Voice Cast: Sophie, Chieko Baisho; *Howl,* Takuya Kimura; *Witch of the Waste,* Akihiro Miwa; *Calcifer,* Tatsuya Gashuin; *Markl,* Ryunosuke Kamiki; *Servant,* Mitsunori Isaki; *Prince,* Yo Oizumi; *King of Ingary,* Akio Otsuka; *Heen,* Daijiro Harada; *Madam Suliman,* Haruko Kato.

English Voice Cast (Disney Pictures and Buena Vista Home Entertainment 2005): Old Sophie, Jean Simmons; *Young Sophie,* Emily Mortimer; *Howl,* Christian Bale; *Witch of the Waste,* Lauren Bacall; *Calcifer,* Billy Crystal; *Markl,* Josh Hutcherson; *Madam Suliman,* Blythe Danner.

Awards: Osella Award; Venice Film Festival, 61st Biennale, 2004. Audience Award; Sitges International Film Festival, 2004. Best Japanese Movie Overall; Mainichi Film Awards, 2004. Animation of the Year; Tokyo Animé Awards, 2005. Best Director: Hayao Miyazaki; Tokyo Animé Awards, 2005. Best Voices Actor/Actress: Chieko Baisho; 2005 Tokyo Animé Awards, 2005. Best Music: Joe Hisaishi; Tokyo Animé Awards, 2005. Audience Award; Mavi Film Festival, 2005. Golden Space Needle Award–1st Runner Up; Seattle International Film Festival, 2005

Other Studio Ghibli Features—1988–2002

Grave of the Fireflies (1988)

Original Title: Hotaru no Haka; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Isao Takahata; *Original Story:* Akihiko

Nosaka; *Screenplay:* Isao Takahata; *Producers:* Shinchosha and Toru Hara; *Executive Producer:* Sato Ryoichi; *Music:* Yoshio Mamiya; *Running Time:* 88 minutes; *Release:* April 16, 1988; *Animation Director:* Yoshifumi Kondou; *Art Director:* Nizo Yamamoto; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yasuda; *Sound Director:* Yasuo Urakami; *Japanese Voice Cast: Seita,* Tsutomu Tatsumi; *Sestuko,* Ayano Shiraishi; *Mother,* Yoshiko Shinohara; *Aunt,* Akemi Yamaguchi.

English Voice Cast (Optimum Releasing 2004): Seita, J. Robert Spencer; *Setsuko,* Rhoda Chrosite; *Mother,* Veronica Taylor; *Aunt,* Amy Jones; *Additional Voices,* Nick Sullivan, Shannon Conley, Crispin Freeman, George Leaver, Dan Green; *Dubbing Supervisor:* Anthony Salerno.

Awards: Special Award; Blue Ribbon Awards, 1989. Rights of the Child Award and Best Animated Feature Film; Chicago International Children's Film Festival, 1994

Only Yesterday (1991)

Original Title: Omohide Poro Poro; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Isao Takahata; *Original Story:* Hotaru Okamoto and Yuuko Tone; *Screenplay:* Isao Takahata; *Producer,* Toshio Suzuki; *Executive Producer:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Music:* Katsu Hoshi; *Running Time:* 118 minutes; *Release:* July 20, 1991; *Animation Directors:* Yoshifumi Kondou, Katsuya Kondou, Yoshiharu Satou; *Art Director:* Kazuo Oga; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yasuda; *Sound Director:* Naoko Asari.

Voice Cast: Taeko, Miki Imai; *Toshio,* Toshirou Yanagiba; *Taeko (Child),* Youko Honna; *Tsuneko Tani,* Mayumi Iizuka; *Mother,* Michie Terada; *Father*, Masahiro Ito; *Nanako*, Yorie Yamashita.

Pom Poko (1994)

Original Title: Heisei Tanuki Gassen Ponpoko; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Isao Takahata; *Original Story:* Isao Takahata; *Screenplay:* Isao Takahata; *Producers:* Yasuyoshi Tokuma, Seiichiro Ujiie, Ritsuo Isobe; *Executive Producer:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Music:* Shang Shang Typhoon; *Running Time:* 118 minutes; *Release:* July 16, 1994; *Animation Director:* Konishi Ken'ichi; *Art Director:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yasuda; *Sound Directors:* Takeshi Seyama, Naoko Asanashi.

Voice Cast: Narrator, Kokondei Shinchou; *Shoukichi,* Makoto Nonomura; *Okiyo,* Yuriko Ishida; *Seizaemon,* Norihei Miki; *Fireball Oroku,* Nijiko Kiyokawa; *Gonta*, Shigeru Izumiya; *Inugami Gyobu,* Gannosuke Ashiya; *Bunta,* Takehiro Murata; *Kincho Daimyoujin VI,* Beichou Katsura; *Yashimano Hage,* Bunshi Katsura; *Abbot Tsurugame* Kosan Yanagiya; *Tamasaburo,* Akira Kamiya.

Whisper of the Heart (1995)

Original Title: Mimi wo Sumaseba; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Yoshifumi Kondou; *Original Story:* Aoi Hiirage; *Screenplay & Storyboards:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Producers:* Hayao Miyazaki, Toshio Suzuki; *Executive Producer:* Yasuyoshi Tokuma; *Music:* Yuji Nomi; *Running Time:* 111 minutes; *Number of Cels:* 56,078; *Number of Colors:* 263; *Release:* July 15, 1995; *Art Director:* Satoshi Kuroda; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yasuda; *Sound Director:* Shuji Inoue.

Voice Cast: Shizuku Tsukishima, Youko Honna; *Seiji Amasawa*, Issei Takahashi; *Mr. Tsukishima,* Takashi Tachibana; *Mrs. Tsukishima,* Shigeru Muroi; *The Baron,* Shigeru Tsuyuguchi; *Shiro Nishi,* Keiju Kobayashi.

My Neighbors the Yamadas (1999)

Original Title: Houhokekyo Tonari no Yamadakun; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Isao Takahata; *Original Story:* Hisaichi Ishii; *Screenplay:* Isao Takahata; *Producers:* Seiichirou Ujiie, Takashi Shouji, Michael O. Johnson; *Executive Producer:* Yasuyoshi Tokuma; *Music:* Akiko Yano; *Running Time:* 104 minutes. *Release:* July 17, 1999; *Animation Director:* Ken'ichi Konishi; *Art Directors:* Naoya Tanaka, Youji Takeshige; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yasuda; *CG Production:* Mitsunori Kataama, Suguru Karube, Miki Satou, Yuuki Yamada, Masashi Inoue, Youichi Mitsui, Noriyuki Kitakawauchi; *Sound Director:* Hideshi Inoue.

Voice Cast: Matsuko, Yukiji Asaoka; *Takashi,* Touru Masuoka; *Shige,* Masako Araki; *Noboru,* Hayato Isobata; *Nonoko,* Naomi Uno; *Fujihara-sensei,* Akiko Yano; *Haiku Reader,* Kosanji Yanagiya; *Special Appearance:* Tamao Nakamura, Miyako Chouchou; *Ghibli Cheering Section:* Yasuko Tomita, Shinta Furuta, Akira Saitou, Makoto Yamanishi, Mizuho Tsushima, Sadanobu Terashita, Akira Matsuda, Michiko Nishida, Junpei Mano, Haruki Tsuji, Hideaki Yoshino, Shouichi Furutashima, Rie Tanaka, Minori Ohnishi, Yoshiko Fujiyama, Miyuki Kawamoto, Yousuke Inaba, Yuuki Itoh, Kazuhiro Shindou, Takumi Kanazawa, Yuuta Komatsuzaki

The Cat Returns (2002)

Original Title: Neko no Ongaeshi; *Status:* Feature Film; *Director:* Hiroyuki Morita; *Original Story & Screenplay:* Reiko Yoshida; *Producer:* Toshio Suzuki; *Executive Producer:* Hayao Miyazaki; *Music:* Yuuji Nomi; *Running Time:* 75 minutes; *Release:* July 19, 2002; *Animation Directors:* Ei Inoue, Kazutaka Ozaki. *Art Director:* Naoya Tanaka; *Color Design:* Michiyo Yasuda; *Sound Director:* Kazuhiro Hayashi. *Voice Cast: Haru Yoshioka,* Chizuru Ikewaki; *Baron,* Yoshihiko Hakamada; *Yuki,* Aki Maeda; *Lune,* Takayuki Yamada; *Hiromi,* Hitomi Satou; *Natori,* Kenta Satoi; *Natoru,* Mari Hamada; *Muta,* Tetsu Watanabe; *Toto,* Yousuke Saitou; *Haru's Mother,* Kumiko Okae; *Cat King,* Tetsurou Tanba; *Chika*, Youko Honna.

Appendix 1: Ancillary Products and Media Synergy

The convergence of cinema and other forms of cultural production and consumption has been incrementally fostered by its use — in Richard Maltby's words — as "an advertising space for the placement of consumer goods" (Maltby 2003, p. 208). The application of cinema as a promotional tool can be traced back to Hollywood's Golden Age: "From the early 1930s, studios were ... involved in publicity tie-ins or tie-ups with other manufacturers. MGM stars drank Coca-Cola between takes for 'the pause that refreshes' in a tie-up worth $500,000 to the studio, while Warner Bros. movies featured the General Electric and General Motors products that their stars also advertised in magazines. Product placement, as the practice of inserting brand-name goods into movies is known, has remained an established Hollywood practice: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) advertised a Pan Am space shuttle, *Back to the Future Part II* (1989) featured Toyota, Texaco, Miller Beer, and Nike shoes, while *Cast Away* (2000) was, among other things, a two-hour promotional movie for Federal Express" (Maltby 2003, p. 146). Another paradigmatic example is supplied by Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report* (2002), where there are constant references to consumer products and stores such as Gap, Pepsi and Bvlgari and product placement seems indeed endless.

The commitment of much recent and contemporary cinema not only to the ethos of product placement but also to the production of myriad spin-offs — often more profitable than the movies themselves — is attested to by the industry's marketing policies and investment practices over the past two decades. For example: "In the early 1980s, world-wide sales of *Star Wars* goods were estimated to be worth $1.5 billion a year, while *Batman* (1989) made $1 billion from merchandizing, four times its box-office earnings. *Jurassic Park* (1993) went so far as to advertise its own merchandizing within the movie: at one point, the camera tracks past the Jurassic Park gift shop, showing a line of T-shirts, lunch boxes, and other souvenirs identical to the ones available for purchase in the lobby of the theatre.... In 1999, the total retail value of the licensed product market was estimated to be more than $70 billion a year, and the most successful movie series existed most prominently as brands or franchises" (Maltby 2003, pp.

190–191). It is worth clarifying, in this context, that the term "franchise" refers to the practice whereby a film triggers a wide range of marginal goods and hence becomes, in Robert Allen's words, "the narrative and iconographic field through which old licenses are renewed and from which new licenses can be harvested—*the malleable materials of fantasy from which other fantasies can be fashioned*" (Allen 1999, p. 121; emphasis added).

Studio Ghibli producer Toshio Suzuki has stated that he wishes he could make a movie with no ancillary merchandise whatsoever and that his test of a film's success lies with whether or not it makes a profit from its theatrical release alone. Miyazaki himself has said that the only important thing to him is people seeing his films in theatres. Nevertheless, Studio Ghibli movies have inspired the production of various peripheral goods. At the same time, however, Miyazaki, Takahata, Suzuki and their associates have managed to take an innovative approach to commercial spin-offs that entails much closer involvement in their conception on the studio's part than is customarily the case. Many movies have been surrounded or followed by a plethora of commodities, yet studios have not often been as directly committed as Ghibli is to monitoring their creation. Specifically, the studio aims consistently at keeping the volume of product licenses issued to manufacturers under control. Moreover, they scrupulously select manufacturers devoted to artistic quality and not exclusively to profit. This implies that some of the appointed merchandise designers may well be allowed to use their own imagination and occasionally depart from Studio Ghibli's original vision rather than adhere slavishly to Miyazaki's own visuals.

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The most popular ancillary products (listed in alphabetical order) include:

- animation film guide books;
- aprons;
- artbooks;
- "Art of..." CD-ROMs;
- bags and purses;
- CDs;
- collector's replicas of props, vehicles and weapons;
- clocks;
- comics sets;
- desktop accessories;
- digital libraries;
- dinner-ware;
- DVDs;
- image models;
- items for babies—e.g. bibs, rattles, musical mobiles, soft balls and mini-rucksacks;
- jewelry;
- keychains;
- magnet boards;
- mats;
- model kits;
- music boxes;
- nap cushions;
- photoframes;
- picture books;
- playing cards;
- postcard collections;
- stationery;
- stickers;
- storyboards;
- stuffed dolls and mascots;
- tissue-cases;
- towels;
- umbrellas;
- wallscrolls.

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Some Stores Offering a Wide Range of Ghibli-Related Goods

www.akadotretail.com
www.animenation.com
www.animespectrum.com
www.animetoxic.com
www.ebay.com (Japanese Animation)
www.fairys-planet.co.jp
http://global.yesasia.com
www.japanbookplaza.com.au
www.jlist.com
www.justbetoys.com
www.planetanime.com
www.store.yahoo.com (Animation/Anime)
www.totoro.org
www.toysnjoys.com
http://us.yesasia.com

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Due to the inherently mercurial nature of the World Wide Web, it cannot be guaranteed that all the website addresses here provided are still available. However, all sites were active at the time of their consultation in the preparation of this book (August 2004–March 2005).

Appendix 2: Fans and Their Worlds

The Internet has provided *animé* fans with forums, chat-rooms and bulletin boards within which they could communicate since at least a decade prior to the term *animé* becoming known to the general public. Accordingly, Miyazaki fans have made extensive use of that medium. Given the Web's exceptionally ephemeral character — whereby sites move, morph, are reconstructed or vanish altogether at a staggering rate — the list of sites offered below is merely indicative and inevitably provisional.

The Miyazaki Mailing List, created at Brown University (Providence, RI) in 1991 to facilitate communication among fans of Miyazaki's works, provides an English-language forum for the discussion of a variety of topics related to Studio Ghibli, and to the films of both Miyazaki and his colleagues. Initially, subscribers were essentially people with something of a specialist interest in *manga* (especially Miyazaki's *manga* version of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*) and in the movies released before 1991. However, as Miyazaki's films gradually became more accessible through fansubs, special screenings and festivals, the fan community grew exponentially, and so did the mailing list. Nowadays, the subscribers are "quite diverse.... They include students, teachers, professors, amateur and professional artists, animation art collectors and dealers, film studio employees and executives, game software developers, publishers of books on relevant subjects, members of the press, and professionals in many other industries" ("Overview").

While fans may simply wish to keep up to date with developments in the field and contribute their own impressions to ongoing debates, professional subscribers may have more specific needs and objectives. For instance, as an increasing number of colleges adopt Ghibli films as standard course material, teachers may join the list in order to glean information and data to be used in the context of the classroom. Members of the press, for their part, may subscribe to the Miyazaki Mailing List to secure early access to information pertaining to newsworthy Studio Ghibli–related events worldwide, as well as to have access to comprehensive archives containing both professional and amateur reviews and articles. Practitioners within the film, animation and computer software industries are also likely to benefit from the list as a means of obtaining useful insights into fan reactions to specific works and, relatedly, into both passing trends and

established preferences. In addition, Miyazaki "Meetups" (local gatherings of people with a common interest which take place face-to-face, though they are frequently organized and coordinated over the Internet) may be held in hundreds of cities worldwide on the same day.[1]

Miyazaki fans have also been expressing their passion and admiration for the director's productions by means of original artworks inspired by the films. These include chalk-and-oil murals, collages, multimedia installations, sculptures and — daintily poised on the dividing line between art and commerce — a Kiki-inspired cake produced by the "Paul" chain of bakeries in France.[2] Among the most impressive instances of fan art to date is a Japanese-style wallpainting created by "Gabriel," based on the pictures decorating the room where Sen confronts Kaonashi at the peak of his gastronomic excesses. (A detailed reproduction of the work is available at the Web address provided.)[3] Also admirable is the incredibly accurate reproduction of the Kittenbus (a miniature Nekobus featuring in the theatrical short exhibited for a limited time at the Ghibli Museum in Mitaka) made by "Micha" and her father out of a Suzuki X-90 (Oklahoma, Summer 2003).[4] Studio Ghibli staff themselves have modified a Fiat 500 so as to make it strictly resemble Lupin's car for exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo in July 2004.[5]

The ranks of faithful Miyazaki fans also comprise practitioners within the animation industry who have deliberately quoted Miyazaki in their works by means of varyingly explicit references to his characters. Ohmu-like figures inspired by *Nausicaä*, for instance, feature in episodes of the *animé* series *El Hazard* and *Excel Saga*, while visual details derived from the world of *Totoro* make their appearance in episodes of *Gunbuster*, *Photon* and *His and Her Circumstances* (*Kareshi no Kanajo Jijou*).

On the other hand, it is also noteworthy that intertextual cross-fertilization does not merely apply to fans' adaptations and/or interpretations of Miyazaki's works but also to the director's own allusions to other artists. These elliptical references may not always have been deliberate, but this does not make them any less poignant. As suggested by the French fan site "Oomu," for example, some of Miyazaki's most memorable images echo the art of René Magritte. In particular, the floating island of Laputa is vividly reminiscent of Magritte's *Le Château des Pyrénées*, while the character of Porco Rosso bears a striking affinity to the central figure in *La Bonne Fortune* and that of Kamaji with the portrait of *Le Sorcier* (http://www.oomu.org/miyazaki-magritte.html).

A further instance of Miyazaki's creative dialogue with other artists is supplied by the Miyazaki/Moebius Exhibition, here discussed in a separate section in recognition of its importance not only for Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli but also for the world of animation at large as a resolute enthroning of this art as worthy of serious consideration by the traditional museum establishment.

Useful Websites

Official Studio Ghibli Site

Sutajio Jiburi (in Japanese) www.ntv.co.jp/ghibli

Studio Ghibli Fan Websites (a selection)

Nausicaä Netwww.nausicaa.net

The most comprehensive and regularly updated collection of pages on Miyazaki and his colleagues, containing detailed analyses of the films and useful links to external sources, and home to the aforementioned Miyazaki Mailing List: nausicaa@list serv.brown.edu

Buta Connection (in French)www.buta-connection.net
Online Ghibliwww.onlineghibli.com
Patheawww.pathea.com/ghibli/index.shtml
Studio Ghibli Netwww.studioghibli.net
WingSee Animé Haven www.wingsee.com/ghibli
General *Animé* websites (a selection)
Anima (in French)www.anima-studio.com
Animé Caféwww.abcb.com
Animé Turnpikewww.anipike.com
Animé Web Guide www.tcp.com/~doi/alan/webguide/
Animintwww.animint.com (in French)
@Animéwww.atanime.com
Keyframewww.keyframeonline.com

Chapter Notes

Introduction

1. *Otaku* designates *animé* fans who have taken their passion for this art form to fetishistic extremes. The Japanese media sometimes employ *otaku* to refer not just to *animé* addicts but to any form of obsession. The Japanese word combines the honorific particle "o" and the *kanji* (Chinese character) for "house" and can therefore be translated as "your honorable house." The term is used to address a person in an exceedingly courteous manner and was initially associated with *animé* enthusiasts on the assumption that they would be withdrawn and largely solitary people given to employing an excessively reverential register due to social ineptitude.

2. Pixar director John Lasseter has described Miyazaki's works as "the most inspirational films" for him, stating that "[a]t Pixar, when we have a problem and can't seem to solve it, we often take a laser disc of one of Miyazaki's films and look at a scene in our screening room for a shot of inspiration. And it always works! We come away amazed and inspired. *Toy Story* owes a huge debt of gratitude to the films of Mr. Miyazaki." Miyazaki's fans within the animation industry also include Barry Cook and Tony Bancroft, directors of Disney's *Mulan*; Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, directors of *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*; Glen Keane, Disney's supervising animator for characters such as the Beast, Pocahontas and Aladdin. Other aficionados of Miyazaki's work are the directors Guillermo del Toro (*Cronos* and *Mimic*) and Tsui Hark (*Once Upon a Time in China* and *Chinese Ghost Story*); Rick Sternbach, illustrator of various *Star Trek* episodes (the *Nausicaäns*, an alien species in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, are indeed named after Miyazaki's heroine); the French artist and writer Jean "Moebius" Giraud, major contributor to the sci-fi comic magazine *Métal Hurlant* and set designer of *Alien*, *The Abyss* and *The Fifth Element*; *manga* illustrator and *animé* director Katsuhiro Otomo; and Shigeru Miyamoto, the top video game designer behind *The Legend of Zelda* and the *Super Mario Bros* series. (*Source*: www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/impact.html)

3. This Japanese phrase can be literally translated as "the sadness of things" or as "the sensitivity of things," the word *aware* denoting both "sadness" and "sensitivity." However, it is frequently rendered into English as "sensitivity to things," principally to refer to an emotional and aesthetic response to natural beauty that is inseparable from a melancholy awareness of its transience. (This is the type of response characteristically associated with the contemplation of cherry blossom or autumn leaves.) *Mono no aware* also alludes to the ability to experience the external world in an artless and unmediated fashion and hence to empathize with one's environment without recourse to language or to other mediators.

Chapter 2

1. This is a veritable treasurehouse of information, including an illustrated biography, a virtual tour of the Tezuka Museum in Takarazuka, and reproductions of a concurrently moving and harrowing series of drawings entitled *Save Our Mother Earth* (http://en.tezuka.co.jp).

2. Miyazaki's *Manga* Productions 1969–1999: 1969—*Puss in Boots* (*Nagagutsu wo Haita Neko*)—*manga* version of the film of the same title; *People of the Desert* (*Sabaku no Tami*)—tale of war and devastation; 1972—*Animal Treasure Island* (*Doubutsu Takarajima*)—*manga* version of the film of the same title; 1982—*To My Sister* (*Imouto He*)—graphic poem; 1983—*The Journey of Shuna* (*Shuna no Tabi*)—variation on the *Nausicaä* theme; 1990—*The Age of the Flying Boat* (*Hikoutei Jidai*)—basis for *Porco Rosso*; 1982–1994—*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (*Kaze no Tani no Naushika*)—*manga* version of the film of the same title with important differences, here examined in the Case Studies section; 1984–1992—*Daydream Data Notes* (*Zassou Nouto*)—graphic essays; 1994—*The Return of Hans* (*Hansu no Kikan*)—World War II story; *Dining in the Air (Kuuchuu de Oshokuji)*—comic history of in-flight meals; 1998–1999—*Tigers Covered in Mud (Doromamire no Tora)*—memories of a German tank commander

Chapter 3

1. Studio Ghibli became an independent corporation separate from Tokuma Shoten in March 2005, when it appropriated the relevant business rights for between 15 and 20 billion yen (approximately $142–$190 million). Studio Ghibli was first established as a subsidiary of the publishing group but subsequently absorbed as

one of its divisions in 1997 in order to abet the parent company's languishing business. The financial recovery of Tokuma's publishing division, however, entails that the company no longer has to depend on its animation division and that Studio Ghibli can therefore break free. Miyazaki, Suzuki and Takahata operate as board members, with Suzuki holding representative rights. (*Daily Yomiuri Online*, February 11, 2005: http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/newse/20050211wo61.htm)

2. As this book enters production, Studio Ghibli is making three new short films for the Ghibli Museum. Miyazaki has drawn the storyboards for all three, and it is highly likely that he will also direct them. What is thus far known is that one of the animations, entitled *Hoshi wo Katta Hi* (*The Day I Got a Star*), is based on Naohisa Inoue's *Iblard* (this is discussed in detail in the chapter on *Whisper of the Heart*, for which Inoue created the background paintings). It is tempting to surmise that the plot of *Howl's Moving Castle*, where star-catching plays a pivotal role, may also have partly inspired Miyazaki in the conception of this project. The other two shorts are centered on a water spider (*mizugumo*) in one case, and on a home-hunting girl in the other. (nausicaa.net, Latest News, January 19, 2005).

Chapter 4

1. The idyllic dimension of the Valley is foreshadowed by *Cagliostro*'s snowcapped peaks and sapphire lakes.

2. Nausicaä's ethos is redolent of the *Gaia* principle formulated by James Lovelock, according to which the Earth in its entirety constitutes a living and conscious entity endowed with intelligence and self-regulatory capacities — a holistic ensemble of organisms and habitats.

3. This word derives from the German *möwe*, meaning "seagull," a bird that the princess's jet-powered glider vividly resembles. The machine plays a crucial part in the film as a non-human companion that faithfully abets the protagonist's quest by enabling her to ride and surf the wind with almost superhuman prowess.

Chapter 5

1. The term designating the magical substance of which Sheeta's pendant is made was translated as *etherium* in the Buena Vista International English dub but as *levistone* or just *levi* elsewhere (e.g. in fansubs and in *The Art of Laputa*).

2. An arguably minor but intriguing detail disclosed by *The Art of Laputa* that neatly encapsulates Miyazaki's affectionate approach to his art is notable here: the portrait of the young Ma Dola hanging on a wall of her kaleidoscopically furnished and boudoir-ish bedroom exhibits a strong resemblance to Sheeta — or, at any rate, Sheeta as she might conceivably look in a few years.

Chapter 6

1. In spite of a mildly disappointing box-office start, *Totoro* went on to become a worldwide Miyazaki favorite among both young and adult audiences, and to influence numerous artists, game creators and software designers as well as, of course, animators. Thus, the film's characters have often been "quoted" in other animations — most recently, in the *Powerpuff Girls* series, where the big Totoro features in two episodes, and in the Cartoon Network series *Code Lyoko* produced by the French studio Antefilms, where the same Totoro makes an appearance in one episode. (The character of the Headmaster used in the latter series, moreover, is explicitly modelled on Miyazaki's physiognomy.)

2. In Japanese culture, the phrase *onegai itashimasu* is used in many different situations, principally in order to convey or exchange a feeling of goodwill about the future of a relationship. Hence, it can be roughly translated as "I am hoping that our relationship holds good things in the future." *Onegai itashimasu* is the polite, reverential form of the more colloquial *onegai shimasu* and therefore connotes a deliberately humble attitude that is most appropriate to the ceremonial solemnity of Mr. Kusakabe's address of the *Tsukamori* (also dubbed by the indigenous people the "King of the Forest").

3. A distinctive feature of Totoro in the bus-stop sequence (and elsewhere) is the presence of a leaf balanced atop his furry head. It is worth noting, in this respect, that the same kind of leaf features in Takahata's *Pom Poko*, where the object is used by the *tanuki* as an aid when they first begin to practice morphing. This detail would seem to corroborate the idea, put forward by several commentators, that affinities obtain between the magical creatures presented in the two films, even though the *tanuki* are established figures in Japanese lore, whereas the Totoros as depicted in Miyazaki's film are fundamentally products of the director's own imagination.

Chapter 7

1. It is worth noting that the Japanese title does not resort to the ordinary way of writing *hotaru* but rather to a combination of the *kanji* for "fire" and another *kanji,* complemented by the *hiragana ru*, meaning "dripping" or "dropping." As Dennis H. Fukushima Jr. has explained, this image, literally translatable as "raining fire," serves to capture "the parallels drawn, in the film, between fireflies, the M-69 incendiary bombs, the B-29 bomber planes, naval vessels, city lights, and human spirits, as well as eyewitness accounts of the bombings" (Fukushima).

2. The bombs deployed for the mass destruction of urban areas by fire, dubbed M-69, were developed by the American National Research Committee in 1942 and consisted of the incendiary gel notoriously known as napalm.

3. As Fukushima notes, "The term used in the dialogue to describe the hillside bomb shelters is *yokoana*, which means 'cave,' 'cavern,' or 'tunnel' (literally, 'side hole'). The term is also used, however, to describe tombs which date back to ancient Japanese times.... Seita and Setsuko move into a *yokoana* both beginning a new life together and heading further towards their own death. The *yokoana* literally becomes a tomb, albeit temporary, for both their mother's ashes and for Setsuko herself" (Fukushima).

4. *Hanami* are viewing festivals in which people gather and party under the dense snowfall of cherry blossom (*sakura*) in spring.

Chapter 8

1. This display of fascistic bigotry is comparable to the hostility evinced by certain groups of parents and teachers in parts of the U.S. towards J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books.
2. The precarious status of witches is conveyed by Kokiri in Kadono's original text: "It used to be that there were all kinds of people with strange and mysterious powers, but ordinary people always associated such powers with evil.... Witches have managed to survive in a hostile world because they changed their attitudes and decided to live together with ordinary folk, give-and-take. Sometimes it's important to be quiet and stay in the background. Other times, we can come forward and help" (Kadono [1985] 2003, pp. 24–25).
3. In a vein redolent of the art of Marc Chagall, Ursula's painting depicts a winged horse transporting a character based on Kiki into a moonlit sky adorned with a flying cow and a murder of crows. The work was executed by a group of pupils from a special school for challenged children, with Kiki's portrait added by Miyazaki.
4. Disney is planning a live-action adaptation of *Kiki* (to be penned by Jeff Stockwell), arguably in order to capitalize on the recent publication of the English translations of Kadono's books as works of children's literature with the potential for tapping into the sort of fantasy world rendered immensely popular by J. K. Rowling.

Chapter 9

1. The representation of the world of ancient China in *Kumokaze* exhibits points of contact with the animation *Fushigi Yuugi*, a TV series aired in 1995–1996 whose title is commonly translated as *Mysterious Play*, where two friends are transported into a legendary Chinese past as a result of reading an incantation contained in a cryptic volume of mythology.
2. The literal translation of the Japanese title is actually "remembering drop by drop."
3. The action of the movie closely mirrors the eminently episodic structure of the *manga* on which it is based by dramatizing the protagonist's experiences in the form of a compilation of reminiscences, incidents and conversations. However, it has a narrative and visual continuity that its comic-book antecedent does not possess insofar as the director has harnessed the loose memoir format to the ongoing presence of the older version of the protagonist in the role of narrator. The flashbacks and contemporary occurrences thus cohere into a whole, each contributing in its particular way to the finale.
4. An explicit reference to menstruation can also be found in Mamoru Oshii's feature film *Ghost in the Shell*. Significantly, where cultural differences are concerned, this has been edited out of the English dub and replaced by the mention of "a loose wire" as the cause of the "noise" in the protagonist's head. Further mentions of menstrual periods feature in Tomomi Mochizuki's TV film *Ocean Waves* and in the *manga* by Mitsuhiko Yoshida entitled *The First-Time Visitor* (*Hajimete no Homonsha*).
5. The film also explains, incidentally, the cultural and historical specificity of the color of the female workers' clothes in *Spirited Away*. In the old days, Taeko explains in the course of recounting the process whereby the safflower petals were washed, trodden, left to oxidize, pounded and sun-dried, the village girls charged with the unrewarding task of picking and curing the flowers, having "no chance of makeup or kimonos," would use the liquid left over from the pressing to dye fabric: "safflower dye brought color into their drab lives." The color in question is a distinctive pink of the kind to be seen in the clothes of Yu-Baaba's female employees at the bath house. This reference seems important, in this context, for it highlights the socio-historical dimension of Ghibli productions even at their most fantastic.

Chapter 10

1. On Miyazaki's own admission, this image is derived from Roald Dahl's "They Shall Not Grow Old" in *Over to You: Ten Stories of Flyers and Flying* (1946). (Dahl himself served in the Royal Air Force in World War II.)
2. Drazen has also stressed that "the present-day arena most like medieval Japan is the world of sports" and that this explains its prominence in animation (Drazen 2003, p. 112). The use of baseball in *Only Yesterday* and of athletics in *Whisper of the Heart* bears witness to the pervasiveness of the sports element by illustrating its incorporation even in films that are only very peripherally concerned with it.
3. These are discussed with reference to *Whisper of the Heart* in a subsequent chapter.
4. Please note that this publication, though controlled by the regime, was also a forum for veiled intellectual dissent, and its appearance in the film therefore serves to corroborate the association of Marco with antigovernment politics. It is also worthy of notice that this is by no means the sole allusion to the film world. Not only is Donald Curtis explicitly implicated in the Hollywood industry, Marco himself is made redolent of Humphrey Bogart in his hard-boiled detective roles by his trench coat and endless packets of *Gitane* cigarettes. Moreover, the sequence in which Gina sings "*Le temps de cerises*" recalls moments in *River of No Return* (dir. Otto Preminger, 1954) and especially Marilyn Monroe's rendition of "I'm Going to File My Claim." The animation which Marco and his former friend watch at the cinema constitutes a composite homage to Winsor McCay, the Fleischer brothers and Disney that could be read as something of a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgment of some of the main sources of inspiration behind Miyazaki's art. The sequence also evinces the influence upon the director of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900–1944), author of *The Little Prince*, who was also an aviation fanatic and a supporter of the Resistance and whose plane was shot down in the Mediterranean during World War II. Finally, *Porco Rosso* makes a subtle allusion to the film world by self-reflexively depicting the Piccolo workshop as a metaphorical replica of an ebulliently

dynamic and slightly crazy animation studio — such as Ghibli.

Chapter 11

1. The film contains a characteristic Studio Ghibli injoke (of the kind to be found also in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Pom Poko* and *Whisper of the Heart*) in the guise of a TV commercial for the "Ghibli Super XII" audio cassette. The allusion to the studio is followed by a further instance of self-referentiality consisting of the foregrounding of *animé* itself through the shot of a *mecha* hero in the typical setting favored by that subgenre.
2. Divorce was for a time considered a major societal scourge in Japan. However, though sorely lamented in the media throughout the 1970s, the divorce rate in Japan has recently stabilized at about twenty-five percent of its U.S. equivalent.
3. Tama, in Western Tokyo, is also the setting of *Whisper of the Heart*. Indeed, *Pom Poko*'s closing scene dovetails into exactly the opening shot of Yoshifumi Kondou's 1995 production, where the same portion of the area is shown, altered beyond recognition.
4. Takahata was also substantially inspired by the activities of the "Badger Action Committee," a citizens group based in western Tokyo concerned with the escalating number of badgers killed on local roads and subsequently committed to an ecological survey of the mammals' lifestyle and habits. Their research led to the incontrovertible conclusion that the environmental deterioration squeezing the creatures out of their mountain habitats was responsible for those deaths (http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/pompoko/impressions.html#14).
5. As Patrick Drazen has pointed out, "[s]ex is a part of life and, in Japan, a part of pop culture" (Drazen 2003, p. 59). Relatedly, "Japanese pop culture takes a much more casual and indulgent attitude toward nudity than pop culture in the West" (p. 48). It is also worth pointing out, in this regard, that if Japanese popular culture often adopts a distinctively non–Western attitude toward sexuality *in general*, the same could be said *specifically* of homosexuality, whereby characters are rarely denigrated on the basis of sexual predilections.
6. The film's ending has been interpreted by some critics, such as Alessandro Bencivenni, as "a satirical metaphor for the failure of the 1960s protests" (Bencivenni 2003, p. 115; my translation).

Chapter 12

1. It must be stressed that Chage and Aska are not idol singers or synthespians but real musicians who have consistently delivered sophisticated melodies and complex lyrics. The song created for *On Your Mark* is no exception, its words evoking simultaneously a marginal sense of hopelessness and a mood of guarded optimism — just as Miyazaki's script and visuals for the video do. The refrain, in particular, lends itself to contrasting interpretations, since the phrase "*ryuukou no kaze*," which it contains, means "flu" both in the literal acceptation of the term and as an idiom referring to "the flu of fashion" — namely, the urge to change constantly in order to be always up-to-date. Thus, the refrain "*I always catch the flu that's going around*" may signify "I always feel the urge to make a fresh start," which can be read as a bleak acceptance of the ideological and economic codes that mold our lives in accordance with the imperative of planned obsolescence, or as a hopeful embracing of genuine prospects of renewal and change.
2. Feminine pronouns and adjectives are here used with respect to the "angel" due to the creature's overtly feminine physiognomy despite the video's intimations that the entity may be of a preternatural order, and that natural gender or sex distinctions may therefore be utterly irrelevant.
3. Note also that there is an overt visual analogy between the image of the winged blue-robed figure that features in the tapestry presented under the film's opening credits in *Nausicaä* and the finale of the last narrative variation proposed in *On Your Mark*. In the *Animage* interview, moreover, Miyazaki designates the music video's angelic creature through the phrase "*tori no hito*" (literally, "a bird's person"), which is also Nausicaä's nickname.

On Your Mark also evinces an interesting visual correspondence with quite a different Studio Ghibli production, Isao Takahata's *Only Yesterday*, in that the contrast between the winged creature's urban captivity and the open rural spaces echoes the opposition between the oppressive atmosphere of Tokyo and the pastoral countryside visited by Taeko on her vacation.

Chapter 13

1. The English title *Whisper of the Heart* has a graceful feel to it but the crux of both the *manga* on which it is based and of the Kondou/Miyazaki cinematic adaptation thereof— given their shared emphasis on the importance of opening up and listening carefully to other people's voices and to the voices within oneself— argues for the greater appropriateness of a literal translation of the Japanese original: namely, "if you open your ears" or "if you listen closely."
2. Please note that Baron plays a pivotal part in Hiroyuki Morita's *The Cat Returns* (2002), the "unofficial sequel" to *Whisper of the Heart*. The sequences for which Inoue produced the concept paintings were a major source of inspiration for Morita in both the original conception of the film and in the process of its execution.
3. The type of imagery prevalent in Inoue's paintings is coincidentally echoed by Shizuku's family name, Tsukishima, which translates literally as "moon island."
4. The book also provides a jocular hint at Miyazaki's approach to teamwork by means of a black-and-white cartoon drawn by Miyazaki himself, in which he appears as the customarily porcine self-caricature in the act of instructing — rather energetically — a visibly harassed digital animator. If it is the case, as has been often rumored, that Miyazaki sometimes pushes his colleagues to the end of their productive tether, he would seem to self-critically admit to it.
5. Mr. Tsukishima comes across as a breath of familial fresh air in his commodious and caring approach to his daughter's conundrum, especially if compared to other father figures portrayed in Ghibli productions such as *Only Yesterday* and *Ocean Waves* who, once they have fulfilled their workplace obligations, wish to

have as little to do as possible with domestic issues and only intervene to take final decisions about controversial matters. In fact, Shizuku's father most resembles Mr. Kusakabe from Miyazaki's *My Neighbor Totoro*.

6. Proud of its zero illiteracy and reputation as the world's best-educated nation, Japan makes the achievement of academic excellence a very high priority indeed. This necessitates that entrance examinations are exceptionally demanding at all levels of the Japanese educational system, including those for some prestigious kindergartens held capable of providing the basis for uninterrupted progression to the most illustrious junior high schools, senior high schools and universities. The intensification of entrance examination competition compels a substantial proportion of the overall school population to attend "cram schools" (*juku*) to prepare for the actual tests. Recent estimates indicate that 24 percent of primary school pupils, 50 percent of junior high school students and 60 percent of senior high school students attend *juku*. This requires them to take extra classes for two to three hours a day after school three to four days a week (and/or during vacations). The curriculum is quite strict, and intensive training based on endless written tests is employed.

As suggested in the chapter on *Porco Rosso*, cram schools are tied up with notions of commitment and hard work initially promulgated by the ethos of *bushido*, a code of conduct closely bound up with samurai culture. The perpetuation of the samurai legacy is indeed noticeable in the use of the term *ronin*—originally referring to a masterless member of the caste—to designate a student who has not yet obtained a university place due to having failed on at least one occasion the relevant entrance exams.

Chapter 14

1. This term is used to designated the sculptures of male youths characteristic of pre-classical Greek art.

2. This vision is corroborated by the poem about Shishigami written by Miyazaki—among several other analogous pieces—in order to communicate his vision to the composer Joe Hisaishi (see poem, quoted in Schilling 1997, p. 19).

3. Although Drazen's comments seem most apposite, it should also be noted that Gaiman had to confront the monumental challenge of matching his translation to the actual film. As Rick Lyman has observed, "he tried to be scrupulous about writing lines that required no more mouth movements than were in the movie" (Lyman 1999). The writer himself has stated: "sometimes I would come up with a really beautiful line that would take four or five mouth movements and I would only have three ... so it had to go" (quoted in Lyman 1999).

Note also that although the characteristically Japanese emphasis upon politeness entails that "there are words for certain body parts and functions that are not generally used in Japanese society," there are also "words that are 'swear words' but are not as socially forbidden in Japan as in the West; *kuso*, for example, is both the literal and figurative equivalent of 'shit,' but doesn't carry the weight of the Western s-word. An actor or an *animé* character can say *kuso* on Japanese television with almost no repercussions" (Drazen 2003, p. 34).

Chapter 15

1. This concept is discussed in detail in the chapter on *Porco Rosso*.

2. Notably, the 1970s witnessed the rise of the so-called "new family," where husbands would be more substantially involved in domestic matters, and wives would increasingly participate in extrafamilial activities. The latter development paved the way to Japanese women's growing involvement in the national workforce.

Chapter 16

1. It is worth bearing in mind, to understand the degree of pressure to which Studio Ghibli was subject in the production of *Spirited Away* from a broader perspective, that Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (dir. Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, 1991) took two whole years to complete, and that this film's production schedule was actually the briefest in Disney's entire history.

2. The first *kanji* forming the name "Chihiro," "chi," is the *on* pronunciation (the original Chinese pronunciation of a *kanji* used as part of a compound). The *kun* pronunciation (the Japanese pronunciation of a *kanji* used as a word in its own right) of the same character is "Sen" (which means "1,000"). "Sen" is also the *on* pronunciation of a completely separate *kanji* meaning "river" (*kun* pronunciation: *kawa*). This reminds us that Japanese affords great potential for wordplay and puns, insofar as the same *kanji* may be pronounced in substantially different ways, while completely different words may have the same pronunciation (though the stress may vary).

3. The *Kasuga Shrine*, situated in the city of Nara, is one of the most famous Shinto shrines and is particularly renowned for its myriad bronze and stone lanterns donated by worshippers. In its ceremonies, paper masks bearing the stylized countenance of an old man are worn; these are analogous to those donned by a large contingent of spirits presented in *Spirited Away*. The *Kasuga* spirits also wear *Sokutai*, traditional clothing characteristic of the ancient nobility, meant to lend a partial semblance of substantiality to their shadow-like bodies.

4. The principal programs used at Studio Ghibli include:

- SoftImage 3D: for the creation of 3D objects and the calculation of reflection or highlight components
- SoftImage Eddie: for digital compositing
- SoftImage Toonz: for digital painting
- MentalRAY: for shadow calculation
- Media Illusion: for morphing sequences
- Flint: for digital layering
- Texture Shader: for the generation of procedural textures (e.g. waves)
- Ray Tracer: for the generation of rays acting as both reflections and highlights
- Render Passes: for the separation of 3D objects into elements to be multiplied across scenes
- Animation Mixer: for the creation of human crowds
- Toonshader: for the evocation of a hand-drawn animation look

Chapter 17

1. Morita also worked on *Kiki's Delivery Service* as in-between animator, and on *My Neighbors the Yamadas* as key animator.
2. The musical theme from the tree-growing sequence in *My Neighbor Totoro* is used again in this film around the finale, plausibly to allude to Haru's own psychological and physical growth.
3. The sequences of *Whisper of the Heart* for which Naohisa Inoue produced the concept art constituted a pivotal source of inspiration for Morita and his team in the production of *The Cat Returns* and, specifically, in the execution of its natural and architectural settings.
4. This elliptical reference to Lewis Carroll's work consolidates the connection between *The Cat Returns* and *Spirited Away*, where Alice-related motifs can also be detected.
5. The director had worked on *Grave of the Fireflies*, and his involvement in this project is what eventually led him to join Studio Ghibli in 1994. His first major contribution to the studio's activities was in the capacity of computer graphics supervisor on *Princess Mononoke*, followed by his production of the entire CGI layout for *My Neighbors the Yamadas*.
6. The Hausu company can be visited at www.housefoods.info/. The commercial can be viewed at www.tzone.otg/~llin/clips/housecm.mpg.

Chapter 18

1. Please consult the specific chapters devoted to these films for detailed assessments of said techniques.
2. Please see the chapter on Pre-Ghibli Productions for further detail.
3. Oshii himself has emphasized the importance of love in *Innocence*: "It may look like a confusing movie as I have been told by many people, but to me, it is a simple love story" (quoted in Koepke 2004). The ample evidence for the growing appeal of Japanese animation supplied by the awards and accolades assigned to *Howl* is confirmed by *Innocence*'s own reception by the international film world. Indeed, Oshii's film was the first *animé* feature ever to compete for the coveted Palme D'Or at Cannes (2004). While *Innocence* is quite different from the film to which the prize was eventually awarded, namely Michael Moore's *Farenheit 9/11,* it is noteworthy that, like Moore, Oshii too sought to document dispassionately a "culture of anxiety and fear" (Oshii 2004).

Postscript

1. Miyazaki himself had at one point been involved in plans for animating *Little Nemo* but abandoned the project before this came to fruition (*Thank You, Mr. Lasseter* Video Documentary).

Epilogue

1. *Eroguro* encompasses diverse manifestations of varyingly bizarre sexualities, sexual proclivities and tools. These include fetishism and scopophilia, sadism, masochism, exhibitionism, underwear-based slapstick, pervert-based medical dramas, sex-cum-bathroom humor and a profusion of phallic tentacles and vagina-like shellfish. These bodily attributes could be seen both as a result of specific iconographic choices that hark back to traditional Japanese painting (e.g. Hokusai's erotic art) and as a concession to censorship in the guise of metaphorical displacement.
2. Please note that this emphasis on the studio's corporate identity does not entail its members' slavish subjugation to its mission and eternal allegiance to its ventures. Miyazaki himself has stated, in this respect:

> I tell [new employees] not to worry about loving the company. That's not the object. I tell them to love their work; to love themselves; to work here for three or four years and then be off to do something more exciting.... If the company goes down, the people still have to eat. So they should be worried more about improving their skills than about loving the company [quoted in Whipple 1992].

3. In the course of the same interview, conducted the day after the attacks on New York and Washington of September 11, 2001, Miyazaki was scarcely concerned with the record-breaking performance of *Spirited Away* and is reported to have angrily asserted: "How can you ask me meaningless questions about my work when we are standing at the edge of a precipice?" (quoted in Takeuchi Cullen 2001).
4. The song, written by Wakako Kaku and performed by Yumi Kimura, had originally been produced for Miyazaki's aborted project *Rin and the Chimney Painter*.
5. It is interesting, in this respect, to reflect on Miyazaki's approach to memory in the specific context of image production. Shogo Hagiwara has documented this issue thus:

> Suzuki says Miyazaki discourages his staff from filing away research materials or making copies of their work. That way, he believes, one can improve one's memory and thus one's imagination. "If it's a text that you find interesting, Miya-san will say: 'Don't copy it. Memorize it. If you forget it later, that means the text wasn't important in the first place.' The same principle is applied to images. You have to memorize them, down to the smallest detail," Suzuki says. "In contrast, Miya-san ... doesn't remember things that happen in his daily life. What he remembers is always related to his images and creations" [Hagiwara 2004b].

Appendix 2

1. For details, please see: http://hmiyazaki.meetup.com
2. For details, please see: www.paul.fr/actualites/fr_actu1.htm
3. www.inanutshell.us/photos/gabriel/Spirited_Away_Wall_Painting_Draft_Part_04.jpg
4. Picture available at: www.higashiko.net/nekobus/kittenbuscar.htm
5. Picture available at: www.ntv.co.jp/ghibli/diary_g/0407.html

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